

**That You May Know the Truth:
A Study of Luke's Gospel
Session I
Introductions and Annunciations**

Luke's gospel contains many of the most beloved stories from the New Testament. Luke alone tells us about the newborn Jesus being placed in a manger because there was no room at the inn. Luke alone tells the story of John the Baptist's birth. Luke alone tells of the angel's annunciation to Mary. Luke alone reports Jesus' parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. And only Luke reports two disciples meeting the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus that first Easter evening.

Our familiarity with many of these stories may lead us to believe we know and understand Luke, but there are a number of factors that tend to work against us. Most obvious is the fact that few of us know the Bible as well as we'd like. And so while we may know some of Luke's stories, we don't always know how they fit into his larger story of Jesus, and we often do not understand how Luke uses these stories to present us with a particular picture of Jesus. Another difficulty springs from the fact that we have multiple gospels, with bits and pieces from each of them working to form a composite image of Jesus in our minds. Thus Luke's account of Jesus' birth is wedded to Matthew's story of a visit from the Magi to create the endearing image found in Christmas nativity displays everywhere. And while homogenized nativity displays are little threat to a mature Christian faith, losing the distinct, individual witness of Luke (or any gospel writer) makes it far too easy for us to assemble a cafeteria plan Jesus, picking an item from this gospel and an item from that one until we come up with an image of Jesus that suits us.

A key to truly knowing and understanding Luke is considering Luke on his own terms. Let us pay close attention to his witness as he presents it, without attempting to harmonize him with some other gospel. At times it may be helpful to consider how and why Luke tells the story differently from Matthew or Mark or John, but such comparisons should be used in helping us understand the particular emphases of Luke, not in papering over differences between gospels.

Luke as Preacher

Fred Craddock, in his *Interpretation* commentary on Luke, suggests thinking of Luke as a preacher with his gospel as a sermon. (Craddock, p. 2) This in no way diminishes the careful way in which Luke presents Jesus as a historical figure. Rather it recognizes that Luke's primary purpose is to proclaim gospel or good news. His primary purposes deal with faith and belief, with the life of the Christian and the Church. Like any preacher, he seeks to elicit response from his hearers, people who he assumes are already drawn to Jesus in some way. And so we cannot read Luke as though it were merely a disinterested account, a historical report.

In passing on his information, Luke chooses the genre of "gospel." Much has been written over the years about just what a gospel is. Many believe it to be a literary form invented by the early church for telling the story of Jesus. Especially in Luke's hands, gospel has affinities with biographies and hero stories of the Greco-Roman world, but gospels were something different. They used a narrative framework (just as sermons sometimes do) in attempting to address and deal with issues within the community of faith. They were not books for the library shelf. They were guides for the Church.

Gospels stand in stark contrast to the most common form of literature in the New Testament, the epistle. An epistle is a letter addressed to a person or community, giving instruction, insight,

correction, etc. More often than not, it is quite explicit in speaking of problems and solutions. For example, when Paul writes to the church at Corinth, it is quite clear that there is a problem in how they administer the Lord's Supper. "When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk." (1 Corinthians 11:20-21) And Paul goes on to give detailed instructions on how the supper is to be handled correctly.

But gospels are more like sermons in that you cannot always tell from hearing or reading them what concerns or problems lie behind them. Perhaps when it is stewardship season, anyone can tell what concern lies behind the sermon, but more often than not, a visitor on Sunday morning might not be able to tell how a particular sermon connects to the life of that congregation. But many of the members will know. In fact, if you were to read all the sermons preached in a church over a couple of years, you would start to get a pretty good idea of what was going on there, even if the sermons didn't say so explicitly.

Gospels are like that. They are not generic recitations of information. They were written to address the needs and concerns of a particular faith community. But we are not a part of that original community. We are a bit like out of town visitors at a Sunday morning service. We may get a great deal out of the sermon, but we may not really understand what it is trying to do since we are not aware of the issues it addresses.

These hidden issues may be partially or even largely recoverable by us, but our way of approaching Scripture often helps to keep them obscured. Our tendency to handle Scripture in discreet, disconnected bits is a prime culprit. Sunday sermons and Bible study classes must, by necessity, handle small blocks of Scripture at a time. But if we never see the larger story, the larger context of the entire gospel, we risk being like someone who watches five minutes of a two hour movie and thinks she understands what the filmmaker is trying to say.

I can't believe I read the whole thing: Luke-Acts as a whole

It is well worth your while to sit down and read Luke's gospel at one sitting. While people often moan at the thought of this, the reality is that the time required is fairly minimal. We may call it "the book of Luke," but it is hardly a book. Individual chapters in some novels are longer. Reading it in its entirety is the only way to get a good feel for Luke's style, for certain things that get emphasized repeatedly, for material that repeats. Reading it through is the only way to get a feel for the flow of the story, to see what sort of material takes center stage where. And reading it straight through makes it much more likely that you will see connections, comparisons, or parallels drawn across widely separated chapters.

In the case of Luke's gospel, these connections, comparisons, and parallels are drawn beyond the book of Luke itself. Luke is part one of a two volume set. Scholars regularly refer to this as Luke-Acts. The positioning of John's gospel between Luke and Acts sometimes obscures this fact, but understanding Acts requires knowing Luke, and understanding Luke will be greatly enhanced by knowing Acts. So when you get to the end of Luke, don't stop; continue with Acts. Your understanding of both books will be greatly enhanced.

Themes to watch for

I don't want overly to color your reading through of Luke, but let me suggest a few themes and concepts to watch for as you are reading.

- **God's Redemptive Plan:** Luke regularly makes clear that the events surrounding Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are a part of God's larger plan to redeem the world. Luke

makes strong connections to the Old Testament, both in speaking of fulfillment of prophecy and in adopting the style and language (and sometimes the very same words) of familiar Old Testament stories in his telling of gospel stories. (For example, see the similarities between Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2 and Mary's song in Luke 1.)

- **Salvation for All:** Salvation is hardly a novel theme for a gospel, but Luke regularly points out that this salvation extends in directions many did not anticipate. It is indeed for all people.
- **Reversal and Inversion:** The normal way of things is often turned on its head in Luke, perhaps most prominently in the notion of poverty as a blessing and wealth as a curse.
- **Table Fellowship:** Table fellowship was of heightened interest to an early Church with Jewish roots that set strict limits on who might sit with you at table. Luke highlights Jesus' table fellowship with sinners and tax collectors, and also highlights the issue of table fellowship for the Church in Acts. The Emmaus road story also serves to stress the importance of meeting the risen Christ within the fellowship of the table.
- **The Powerful Work of the Holy Spirit**

Who, when, where, etc.

Technical questions about who wrote a particular gospel, what his sources were, and so on have received less attention from scholars in recent years. More and more the emphasis is on understanding the work as a literary whole, not on dissecting its pieces. Still, some background on these issues is often helpful.

We know almost nothing about who wrote the Gospel of Luke. The name of Luke the physician was attached to the work early in the life of the Church, but we don't know how that happened. Nowhere does either Act or Luke give any clue as to who did the writing. Some scholars argue that the writer was likely to be Paul's companion on his journeys. Others argue that theological differences between Luke and Paul suggest an author who was not a companion. In the end, we can't really know, but we continue to call the author Luke because we need some name by which to identify the work.

We do know that Luke writes in the most polished Greek of any New Testament author. He is also very well acquainted with the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. Long accepted consensus is that he is a Gentile. He himself says he was not an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life. The assumption is that he writes for a Gentile audience, but clearly he expects them to know their Scripture, what we call the Old Testament.

There is nearly universal acceptance that Luke gets much of his material from Mark, likely the first written gospel. It would seem that Luke has some other sources available to him. One is called "Q." This source is postulated from the fact that both Matthew and Luke share events not found in Mark. Luke also has events and parables not in Matthew, so he must have had another source (or sources). Most scholars assume that Matthew and Luke write their gospels independently, each having Mark and "Q" available and each having a unique source or sources.

All this means that Luke is most likely written in the last 30 years of the first century. (Some see textual evidence that Luke knows of the destruction of Jerusalem which occurs in 70.) While it seems to address Gentile readers, there is nothing which gives us any real clues as to its place of origin, though some suggest locations on the flimsiest of evidence. In the end, the vast majority of what we can learn about Luke's gospel will come from our careful reading and consideration of the material we have before us.

An Outline of Luke

- I. 1:1-4, Prologue
- II. 1:5-2:52, Infancy and Childhood
 - A. 1:5-56, Two Annunciations
 - B. 1:57-2:20, Two Births
 - C. 2:21-52, Two stories of Jesus at the Temple
- III. 3:1-4:13, Preparation
 - A. 3:1-20, John the Baptist
 - B. 3:21-22, Jesus' Baptism
 - C. 3:23-38, Genealogy
 - D. 4:1-13, Temptation
- IV. 4:14-9:50, Ministry in Galilee
 - A. 4:14-15, Introduction
 - B. 4:16-30, Jesus at Nazareth
 - C. 4:31-5:16, Ministry in Capernaum
 - D. 5:17-6:11, Early Controversies
 - E. 6:12-49, Choosing and Training Disciples; The Sermon on the Plain
 - F. 7:1-8:50, Jesus Made Manifest in Word and Deed
 - G. 9:1-50, Who Is Jesus; Questions, Confession, and Predictions of the Cross
- V. 9:51-19:28, Journey to Jerusalem
 - A. 9:51-62, Nature of the Journey
 - B. 10:1-24, The Seventy
 - C. 10:25-42, Love of God and Neighbor
 - D. 11:1-13, Teachings on Prayer
 - E. 11:14-54, Controversies
 - F. 12:1-13:9, Warnings and Encouragement
 - G. 13:10-35, Kingdom reversals and Passion Warnings
 - H. 14:1-24, Table etiquette
 - I. 14:25-35, Teachings on Discipleship
 - J. 15:1-32, Three Parables of Joy
 - K. 16:1-31, On Wealth
 - L. 17:1-10, Forgiveness and Faith
 - M. 17:11-19, Ten Lepers
 - N. 17:20-37, The Kingdom's Coming
 - O. 18:1-19:27, The Gospel to Rich and Poor
- VI. 19:28-21:38, Ministry in Jerusalem
 - A. 19:28-40, Entry
 - B. 19:41-46, Jesus Weeps and Cleanses Temple
 - C. 19:47-21:38, Teachings in the Temple
 - i. 19:47-21:4, Controversies
 - ii. 21:5-38, Apocalyptic Discourses
- VII. 22:1-23:56, The Passion
 - A. 22:1-38, Last Supper
 - B. 22:39-46, In the Garden
 - C. 22:47-53, Arrest
 - D. 22:54-71, Jewish Trial
 - E. 23:1-25, Trial before Pilate
 - F. 23:26-56, Crucifixion and Burial
- VIII. 24:1-53, Resurrection Stories
 - A. 24:1-12, Empty Tomb
 - B. 24:13-35, Emmaus Road
 - C. 24:36-53, Appearance to the 11, Commissioning, and Departure

Further study

I've drawn on a number of sources in producing this study in addition to my own reading of the texts. I've listed the more important sources below. I have copies of some of these if you would like to borrow them. The Craddock commentary is written for non-scholarly consumption, as are the Walker and Ringe books (which I do not own).

Craddock, Fred B. *Luke, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, James Mays, editor (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990)

Danker, Frederick W. *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

Danker, Frederick W. *Luke, Proclamation Commentaries*, Gerhard Krodel, editor (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

Ringe, Sharon H. *Luke, Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

Walker, Thomas W. *Luke, Interpretation Bible Studies* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001).

Culpepper, R. Alan in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

Readings for this session: **Luke 1:1-56; Acts 1:1-2; 1 Samuel 2:1-10**

Exploring the readings

Luke's gospel is unique in its use of a formal Hellenistic dedication to introduce his work to the reader. Many a scholar has commented on the extremely polished literary style of these opening four verses. (The verses are a single sentence in the Greek and in many English translations.) The style reflects the convention used in histories and biographies of Luke's day. It sets out the purpose of the work to follow, though one must admit that it doesn't say a great deal. Culpepper (p. 39) says, "It seems to be both carefully worded and deliberately vague, simultaneously clarifying and obscuring."

Luke addresses the gospel to a "Theophilus," literally "Friend of God" or "Lover of God." There is a debate as to whether or not Theophilus is a real person. Despite its religious sounding meaning, it is an actual name that was not uncommon. Some suggest that the work is dedicated to Luke's patron, a Gentile of means and standing who is a member of Luke's faith community. Others suggest he is a symbolic character, and thus the work is dedicated to all the friends of God who desire to hear "an orderly account...so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

Some things are clear from this prologue. Luke and his presumed readers are members of the Christian faith. Stories of Jesus' life have been handed down to them through "eyewitnesses." They have "been instructed" in some way about "the events that have been fulfilled among us." There are apparently sources that can be "investigated." **Given all this, what are some possible reasons behind Luke's decision "to write an orderly account"? What sort of "truth" might he think Theophilus needs to know?**

The style of Luke's writing makes a dramatic shift at verse 5. The very stylized, conventional writing of the prologue gives way to a style reminiscent of the Septuagint or Greek Old Testament. (It is important to remember that when people in Luke make reference to "the

Scriptures,” it is this Septuagint to which they refer.) Echoing Old Testament stories, we meet a barren couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. In a manner typical of Old Testament epiphany/call stories, Gabriel appears to Zechariah, calling him and Elizabeth to take part in God’s plan “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” As readers familiar with epiphanies from Israel’s history might expect, something of a standard formula follows. There is objection, sign, and fulfillment. Zechariah is struck mute and Elizabeth conceives.

The opening four verses may lead us to expect a biography of a wealthy, mighty king or warrior hero. The initial mention of Herod may increase such expectation, but the story quickly leaves the realm of Herod and Kings. **What does the opening of Luke’s story, which begins, not with kings and palaces but with a faithful, old, barren couple, say about the ways of God?**

What significance do you see to Luke beginning his story with Old Testament patterns and with faithful, pious Jews?

The annunciation to Mary follows the same sort of pattern with saw with Zechariah. It is a story many of us know. Mary is labeled chosen called “favored one.” She too will be enlisted in God’s plans. The story tells us little about Mary or her background, leaving us to wonder about the reasons she is chosen. **Why do you think Mary is “favored?” What do we learn about God in the choice of Mary? What do we learn about what it means to be blessed or favored by God?**

Mary’s visit to Elizabeth features the Holy Spirit, who is also prominent in the two preceding annunciations. The Spirit enables Elizabeth to speak truth she could not otherwise know. Presumably it is this same Spirit which allows Mary to respond. (Compare Mary’s song to Hannah’s in 1 Samuel 2.) **According to Mary, what are some essential elements of God’s plan beginning to unfold through Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Mary?**

Session II Two Sons Are Born

Readings for this session: **Luke 1:57-2:52**

Exploring the readings

For Luke the messianic age dawns with the births of John and Jesus. Popular expectation was for a Messiah who would defeat Israel's enemies, thus bringing peace. But this will not be the way of Jesus. Nevertheless, the births of both Jesus and John are connected to peace in Luke. When John is named, Zechariah's muteness is broken. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he utters prophecy, a prophecy that gives hints of what this unexpected messianic age will look like. It contains typical Old Testament language of being saved from enemies and fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. But beginning in 1:74, the prophecy starts to talk about attributes of this new age. **What are some of the key elements of what is about to happen according to Zechariah's prophecy?**

Luke now leaves John in the wilderness to grow and become strong in the Spirit. Allusions to Samuel and Samson from the Old Testament seem likely here. But John's introduction to the world will have to await Jesus' birth. After all, John's role is to prepare the way for Jesus, and it makes no sense to report on John's ministry without first telling of Jesus' arrival.

What follows are likely some of the most familiar verses of the Bible. "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus..." As he did with the start of the annunciation stories, Luke positions the events historically, as we might expect in an orderly account. Not only do we hear of Augustus but of Quirinius the governor of Syria. But perhaps Luke's intent is not simply to supply a historical setting. Just as the announcement of John's birth began with a mention of Herod, Jesus' birth narrative is set within the context of Roman power and rule. **Aside from simple historical realities, what might Luke be trying to communicate by locating Jesus' birth amidst Roman rule and its power to register and tax?**

What does it say about God that God comes into the midst of Roman splendor and power as a helpless baby?

Jesus is placed in a manger because there is “no place for them in the inn.” The picture may be slightly different from our conception of the “No Occupancy” sign turned on at the Marriott. The “inn” may have been a guest room in a house or the sleeping area in a one room house. With the guest room or sleeping area full, Jesus must be placed in the animal’s feed trough, perhaps within the same house.

As with Matthew’s gospel, Luke now announces Jesus’ birth to others. This is a situation where mingling Luke and Matthew’s gospels likely obscures some of what Luke is saying. Matthew has the birth announced to Magi, but Luke has nothing of this sort. The only ones told are shepherds in the fields. Shepherds are of an entirely different sort than Magi. “Shepherding was a despised occupation at the time... in the first century, shepherds were scorned as shiftless, dishonest people who grazed their flocks on others’ lands.” (Culpepper, p. 65) **What might Luke be communicating by having these sort of folks be the only ones to whom Jesus’ birth is announced?**

What positive imagery might be drawn from Jesus’ connection to shepherds?

We who know the story of Jesus’ birth well are not in the least surprised at the angels’ singing. We’ve heard it before. This isn’t just pageantry though. The angels’ announcement to shepherds is indeed good news, gospel, proclaiming God’s incredible grace breaking into the world. It is “news of great joy for all people,” for Israel and other lands as well. Once the angels have given their news, they simple must sing from joy and gratitude over what God has done. (The shepherds will do much the same in v. 20.)

The content of their song is not quite what some of us learned as children, words of “goodwill to men.” Better scholarship on the Greek texts, along with discovery of some parallel statements in the Dead Sea Scrolls, makes it clear that the “goodwill” or “favor” spoken by the angels refers to God’s goodwill and not to something bestowed on people. Thus the NRSV translates the song so that it is clear that peace comes to those whom God favors. The NIV also leans this way while trying to retain some of the feel of older translations.

Look at the NRSV version of the angels’ song. “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” **What strikes you about the song? What is it saying? Does it tell us anything about what God is up to or what Jesus will do?**

In the shadow of Caesar Augustus, who was sometimes hailed as divine and a great bringer of peace, Luke announces this birth of another king through whom true peace comes. The shepherds visit and tell of the angels' message. Clearly others are at the house/stable as "all who heard it were amazed..." Mary, the faithful servant of the Lord mulls over the report in her heart, considering the meaning of all that is happening. And the shepherds, having seen the things the angels reported, become witnesses to God's word and then join the angels' praises.

Next we learn of Jesus' circumcision and Mary's purification at the temple. (Luke speaks of "their purification" although this ritual was to purify the woman 40 days following the birth of a son. Perhaps Luke simply wants to make this an all family event and so uses "their.") Jesus' parents carefully observe the law of Moses. Jesus is born and raised faithfully within this covenant. According to Leviticus 12, an offering of a lamb and of a pigeon or turtledove were to be made. But if a woman could not afford this, two turtledoves or pigeons were allowed. Mary and Joseph bring this less expensive offering, confirming their humble status.

Luke mentions the consecration of firstborn sons to God in v. 23. In the story of Samuel (see 1 Samuel 1) Hannah dedicates her son to God, leaving him to serve at the temple. Standard practice, however, was to "redeem" the son with a monetary offering to the priests. Interestingly, Luke has Jesus' parents present him at the temple with no mention of his being redeemed. Thus Jesus' story fits neither the pattern of Samuel or of other Israelites who were redeemed from their consecrated status so that they might return home. **What might Luke be indicating by Jesus' dedication/consecration at the temple, but without the normal purchase of redemption?**

Now the family encounters Simeon in the temple. The regular Lukan pattern of the Holy Spirit's role in all that is taking place continues as we learn that the Spirit rested on Simeon, directed him to Jesus in the temple, and, no doubt, inspired his song. By now it should be obvious that these Spirit filled songs are full of information about God's plans and God's Messiah. **What does Simeon's song tell us?**

What do Simeon's words to Mary in vv.34-35 tell us about this Messiah?

There follows a second encounter in the temple, this one with the prophet Anna. This encounter supplies us with little new information about Jesus or God's plan, so perhaps Luke reports it for other reasons. **What significance do you see in this encounter with Anna?**

The story of twelve year old Jesus in the temple is unique among the biblical gospels, the only report of his childhood. (Some non-canonical gospels such as the Gospel of Thomas purport to tell of Jesus as a child. However even the early Church regarded these as fanciful inventions, cheap accounts of Jesus animating toy animals and using his powers against taunting playmates, a Jesus who seemingly succumbed to temptation to abuse his power. These gospels were rejected by the early Church as heretical and tossed. They are not “lost gospels” as some current writers like to suggest.) Unlike the Gospel of Thomas, Luke has no interest in filling in the big gap of information of Jesus’ early life with fanciful accounts. Rather he tells this single story from Jesus’ childhood because it reveals important truths about Jesus, his work, and the life of faith. Twelve years after the story of baby Jesus at the temple, the family comes to the temple once more. As before, Jesus’ parents are portrayed as careful observers of the Mosaic Covenant. But on their return from the festival, Jesus is inadvertently left behind. Once his parents realize he is missing, they do as any parents would, commencing a panicked search, only to find him talking with the rabbis, amazing everyone by his wisdom. It seems that Luke’s concern in telling this story is more theological than historical (which is not necessarily to question the historicity of the events). In this story (and perhaps in the birth narrative as well) Luke addresses questions of Jesus’ nature. It may not be of much concern to us, but the early Church had intense debates over how, when, and in what sense Jesus became and was the Son of God. **What sort of answer does Luke seem to be giving through this story?**

When Mary and Joseph find Jesus, they are naturally upset and begin to chastise him. Jesus seems perplexed, saying, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (The Greek doesn’t actually contain the word “house.” It literally says “...I must be in my Father’s.” The word “house” is supplied by translators because it fits the context. However it might also be appropriate to translate it “I must be about my Father’s business” or something of that nature.) With this story, Luke raises the issue of divided loyalties. He will go on to say that Jesus is a good boy. He returns with his parents and “was obedient to them.”

It seems likely that Luke isn’t simply commenting on Jesus’ nature but also on the nature of all his followers who are filled with the Holy Spirit. **What insights into Jesus and into the life of faith can we garner from this story?**

At the close of the story we learn that “Jesus increased in wisdom and years...” This echoes the close of the dedication story (v. 40) where “The child grew and became strong...” While Luke may insist that Jesus is born Son of God, he is no god masquerading as a human. He is a real child, growing, learning, and discovering who he is.

Session III Preparing the Way

Readings for this session: **Luke 3:1-4:13; Isaiah 40:3-5**

Exploring the readings

The report of John's ministry combines elements of Greco-Roman histories and Old Testament prophetic calls. The extended listing of emperor, governor, rulers, and priests sets John and Jesus' ministries firmly on the stage of world history, although Luke doesn't really offer the precise dating that one might suppose could be found here. Most scholars feel a date of 25-30 CE is all the precision Luke's report allows. But while Luke surely wants to establish John and Jesus as historical figures, his purposes in this elaborate listing of rulers and priests may not be primarily concerned with issues of history. (This historical introduction covers both the beginning of John and Jesus' work, and so any insights would refer to Jesus' ministry as well as John's.) **What reasons might Luke have for so vividly reminding us of the Roman governance and power network along with Israel's priestly leadership?**

By saying "the word of God came to John," Luke establishes John's call as a prophet of the Lord. He then describes John's work in light of Isaiah 40. (When you read Isaiah 40 you will notice some distinct differences in it and Luke's quote of it. In Isaiah, the voice cries out instruction to make a way in the wilderness. But Luke understands that the voice is in the wilderness. This arises because Luke knows the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures which has more than a few textual errors, this being one of them.) The Isaiah passage is a salvation oracle, originally uttered to exiles in Babylon. Now that salvation is connected with a baptism of forgiveness and the coming of Jesus. **Why does Luke want to make explicit this connection between John and Old Testament prophecy?**

John calls those who come out to him "a brood of vipers," and demands that they "bear fruits worthy of repentance." Luke's account is different from Matthew's where "vipers" describes Pharisees and Sadducees, not the crowds in general. In Matthew these words serve to single out these religious leaders for scorn while in Luke, John's words serve to open a conversation with the crowds about the meaning of their "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Luke seems to be saying that the "salvation of God" that is beginning to unfold will make demands of those who receive it. We start to learn here something of the "way of peace" promised in Zechariah's prophecy. **What do John's words teach us about what it means to live within God's salvation?**

Notice that in vv. 15-18 the people respond positively to John's message, which is labeled as "good news" or "gospel." Also notice that Luke avoids any description of John's appearance. Why is uncertain, though perhaps Luke thinks his audience would draw the wrong impression from clothing of camel's hair and a diet including locust.

There is one person, however, who does not receive John's message well. Herod has been rebuked by John and responds by throwing him in prison. (Only Luke records John's imprisonment prior to telling of Jesus' ministry. Luke also does not record John's death.) The Herod in question is Herod Antipas. He is a son of Herod the Great who was king at the time of Jesus' birth. None of Herod the Great's sons ever enjoyed the power and prestige of their father. Various sons served as tetrarchs (sometimes translated "ruler") and governors in portions of their father's divided kingdom. Herod Antipas was well known outside the Bible for his scandalous marriage to Herodias. Herodias was a daughter of Herod the Great by a different mother. She was originally married to a different son of Herod the Great by yet another mother. Herod Antipas proposed to Herodias while visiting her and his half-brother. She agreed on the condition that Herod Antipas ditch his current wife, which he did. This behavior outraged many devout Jews. Herod Antipas also desecrated a cemetery in building the city of Tiberius on the shore of Lake Galilee and then had to force unwilling Jews to live there. Herod Antipas got his due eventually. His armies were defeated by the armies of his former father-in-law, who attacked Herod to avenge his disgraced daughter. Josephus, the Jewish historian records the events. "But to some of the Jews the destruction of Herod's army seemed to be divine vengeance, and certainly a just vengeance, for his treatment of John, surnamed the Baptist. For Herod had put him to death, though he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous live, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and in so doing to join in baptism." (quoted from Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* in Culpepper, p. 88)

In Luke's telling, the people respond well to John's preaching but Herod reacts by throwing John in prison. **What hints about how Jesus will be received might we take from these events?**

The story now turns to Jesus' baptism. Because Luke has already reported John's arrest, it is only implied from the context that John is the one who baptizes Jesus. John's name is never mentioned. Perhaps this is Luke's manner of dealing with a significant problem for the gospel writers. John seems to have been better known figure in his day than Jesus was, and he still had significant disciples when the Church first began to grow. The early Church had to combat the claim that John was superior to Jesus because he had baptized Jesus. All the gospel writers make some attempt to counter this claim, though Luke is the only one who uses John's arrest to all but remove him from the scene of the baptism.

In truth, Luke doesn't report a baptism at all but picks up the story after Jesus had been baptized and was now praying. Prayer receives special emphasis at many points in Luke's gospel. **What significances do you see in Jesus praying before the Spirit descends on him?**

As Jesus prays the Spirit descends onto him, bodily in the form of a dove, and a voice speaks from heaven. Luke here follows Mark in having the voice addressed to Jesus and apparently not audible to others. “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” The early Church struggled to fully express the nature of Jesus, and intense religious debates racked the Church over this issue in the third and fourth centuries. Luke has already laid out much of his understanding through his birth and childhood narratives. **What do we learn about who and what Jesus is in Luke’s account of the baptism?**

Genealogies were much more important in the ancient world than they are in ours. Interestingly, modern people often spend a great deal of time tracing our own family trees, but more often than not we skip over genealogies when we encounter them in the Bible. There are more than 20 genealogies in the Old Testament, but only two make the New Testament, Luke’s and the longer and likely better known genealogy that opens the gospel of Matthew. There are probably more differences than similarities between these two genealogies. Aside from the simple fact that it is impossible to harmonize the differing names in the two, Matthew’s is before Jesus’ birth and Luke’s is after Jesus’ baptism. Matthew starts with Abraham and works forward. Luke starts with Jesus and works backwards. For Matthew the connection is to Abraham, the start of the people of Israel. For Luke the connection stretches back to Adam. Perhaps Luke wants to make some comment on Jesus as the new Adam; perhaps not. But clearly Luke situates Jesus within the scope of all people, not just Israel. Situated where it is, between the announcement “You are my Son” and the temptations which operate around the challenge, “If you are the Son of God...” Luke’s genealogy seems to emphasize what Luke has been stressing since the annunciation to Mary. Jesus is the Son of God, words echoed at the end of the genealogy.

The genealogy begins with the note that Jesus was about thirty when he began his ministry. This is the only place in the Bible that tells of Jesus’ age. It fits well with the other references in Luke’s gospel. There are some indications that people of this time period viewed the age of thirty as the age of maturity.

If the genealogy confirms Jesus’ identity, the temptations that follow begin to explore the meaning of that identity. From Luke’s standpoint, the temptations are not accidents. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness where he will hone his identity as Son of God. At the end of a 40 day period of fasting and temptation by the devil, we hear that he is famished and we hear a threefold temptation by the devil. The first and last temptations begin with the formula, “If you are the Son of God...” There is no way to adequately translate this Greek phrase into English. The “If you are” indicates a question about Jesus’ identity. However, the Greek construction implies a statement that is true. Some would translate “Since you are the Son of God...” But this is probably too explicit, ignoring the literal reading of the text. Another possibility is “If you are the Son of God (and I know that you are)...” This is perhaps closest to the Greek meaning, but it is rather cumbersome. In the end, we are simply left with the inability of English to fully capture the original Greek. The best we can do is read “If you are...” and realize that an assumption that this is true is imbedded within the statement.

And so the true point of this story is to begin working out the nature of Jesus' sonship. What would a Son of God do? This is the crucial question, not whether Jesus is God's Son. In fact, the temptations ask Jesus to be the sort of Messiah people expect, to be more like many hope him to be but not who God wants him to be.

The passage on Jesus' temptation does little to settle issues of the reality of evil personified as devil or Satan. These verses can be read in a compelling manner either with a real Satan speaking to Jesus or with the devil as a metaphor for the sin and evil that tempts human beings to be other than they are created to be. Fred Craddock writes:

It is important to keep in mind that a real temptation beckons us to do that about which much good can be said. Stones to bread—the hungry hope so; take political control—the oppressed hope so; leap from the temple—those longing for proof of God's power among us hope so. All this is to say that real temptation is an offer not to fall but to rise. The tempter in Eden did not ask, "Do you wish to be as the devil?" but, "Do you wish to be as God?" There is nothing here of debauchery; no self-respecting devil would approach a person with offers of personal, domestic, or social ruin. That is in the small print at the bottom of the temptation. (Craddock, p. 56)

Look at the three temptations. Describe how each of them might be understood as natural temptations to Jesus rather than absurd challenges by a devil. Describe how they might be seen as reasonable enticements for Jesus to interpret his sonship in ways contrary to God's will.

Speak about how such temptations are a part of your life of faith.

Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke does not have Jesus comforted by angels at the conclusion of the temptations. Instead the devil, "departed from him until an opportune time." **In what sense might Jesus be vulnerable to further temptation?**

Session IV Disciples and Controversies

Readings for this session: **Luke 4:14-6:16; Isaiah 58:6, 61:1-2**

Exploring the readings

The beginning of Jesus' ministry is marked by a very brief introduction found in 4:14-15. There are several very important emphases in these verses. Jesus begins his ministry "filled with the Holy Spirit." The presence of the Holy Spirit is a crucial element in all that happens in Luke-Acts. Then there is the note that Jesus "began to teach in their synagogues." John had already begun to teach the people what it meant to "bear fruit worthy of repentance." Jesus now continues to teach what it means to live in the ways of salvation and peace. Teaching is crucial because the new thing Jesus offers requires a response of obedience to God's will. Finally, Jesus "was praised by everyone." This may seem an extraneous remark, simply noting that Jesus was well received. But this is in fact the appropriate human response to what God is doing. The Greek word describing the people's praise is *doxadzo* (*doca/zw*) from which we get our word *doxology*. The basic meaning of the word is "glorify," and its use here recalls the line from the first question and answer in Westminster's Shorter Catechism. "Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

Luke then moves Jesus quickly to Nazareth. In Mark this happens well into the Galilean ministry, but in Luke it serves as the starting point for Jesus' ministry. Jesus comes to the synagogue of his hometown, and we learn that he normally goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He is treated as a visiting rabbi, allowed to read from the scroll and interpret. We do not know very much about synagogue worship in Jesus' day, but apparently there had developed a kind of liturgy and even a lectionary of sorts with readings from the Law and from the prophets. Details of how this all worked are unknown, but Luke clearly understands that Jesus chooses a particular text from the prophets rather than reading a proscribed text.

The text Jesus reads is from Isaiah. The words Luke reports are a slightly altered version of Isaiah 61:1 with a line from 58:6. The line about "recovery of sight to the blind" is not in our Bibles, but is in the Septuagint that Luke knows. Luke also omits the line about binding up the brokenhearted. Jesus' proclamation that this prophecy is now fulfilled further confirms the nature of his work. **What is the nature of the Messiah's work according to this passage?**

No one is particularly troubled by what Jesus reads or says. "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth." It is Jesus who seems to precipitate a conflict. The gist of the proverbs he quotes imply that the people of Nazareth will expect Jesus to confer special blessings on them by virtue of their association with him. But Jesus makes it abundantly clear that God's grace is not restricted to them or to Israel. **Why do the people react**

so negatively to Jesus' words stating that God's goodwill is not confined to Israel? Does our thinking at times parallel what Jesus assumes is in the heart of his hometown folks?

In 4:31-44, we see Jesus beginning to live out the words he quoted from Isaiah. Again he is teaching in the synagogue, but he also casts out demons, freeing people from their captivity to what we would label mental illness. Unlike humans, demons know who Jesus is. As spiritual beings they know what humans do not. Their calling Jesus by name, "Jesus of Nazareth," in 4:34 opens a contest of sorts. In ancient thinking, the naming of another was a way of gaining superiority over him. But the contest between the "spirit of an unclean demon" and the Spirit filled Jesus is no contest at all. Jesus' authority surpasses that of anything heretofore seen.

Following this episode, Jesus enters Simon's home where his mother-in-law is sick. Since Jesus has not yet called Simon as a disciple, this story reads a little differently than it does in Mark, where Simon, Andrew, James, and John are already followers. The story preserves an ancient understanding of sickness. Here the problem is that she is possessed by a fever and the cure involves having the fever leave her. Of interest is the mother-in-law's response to the healing. "Immediately she got up and began to serve them." On one hand this could be seen as her returning to her traditional role now that she is well. But it might be thought of quite differently. **How might her response be seen as an appropriate Christian response to the transforming power of God in Christ?**

In vv. 40-41 Jesus continues to heal the sick and the demon possessed. Again we hear that the demons recognize Jesus, though Jesus does not allow them to speak. Certainly Luke argues persuasively here against any understanding of Jesus as simply a great teacher. There is divine power present here that powers of evil recognize and fear.

Vv. 42-44 conclude this section with Jesus' words that he "must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other cities also." Though the crowds would prevent him from leaving, Jesus must move on. Perhaps there are echoes of the events at Nazareth here. **What significance do you see in the people's desire to keep Jesus there and his desire to move on?**

We now turn to the first calling of disciples. The miraculous catch reported in chapter 5 is remarkably similar to a resurrection appearance of Jesus reported in John 21:3-8. Initially Jesus simply borrows Simon's fishing boat as a floating podium because of the tremendous crowds.

Simon clearly already knows Jesus since a healing at his house has already been reported. Simon is initially obedient to Jesus even though the command to cast the nets seems foolish to him. The miraculous catch overwhelms both Simon's boat and a second boat called in to help. Simon appropriately realizes that this is not simply a coincidence. This is the work of God and, in words reminiscent of Isaiah 6:5, Simon asks Jesus to go away for he is "a sinful man!" Just as in previous angelic appearances, Jesus must say, "Do not be afraid," and he adds, "from now on you will be catching people."

Only in Luke is the calling of disciples connected to a miracle of Jesus. Interestingly, the call of Paul in Acts will similarly come about through a miraculous event. Luke's twin heroes of the early Church, Peter and Paul, will both be pulled into their work as apostles by the radical intrusion of God in Christ into their everyday lives.

The close of this story says, "...they left everything and followed him." This is a more explicit statement than occurs in Mark. **What does this say about the nature of discipleship?**

The story of a leper's healing is a simple miracle story that overflows with religious symbolism. Leprosy in the Bible describes a wide array of skin disease, but likely not Hansen's disease which we associate with leprosy. Still leprosy made people unclean, cutting them off from life in the community. It also was associated with sin and God's judgment. In this story, the theme of reversal is prominent. The outcast leper is made clean and now can return to life in community. Conversely, Jesus touches the unclean man, making himself unclean. Perhaps in that sense, Jesus' withdrawal to deserted places to pray has more meaning than simply escaping the press of popularity. **Comment on the symbolism you see in this passage.**

The healing of a paralytic introduces controversy into the story for the first time. In Luke's version of this story, many in the crowd preventing access to Jesus are Pharisees and scribes. These teachers of Israel provide a powerful contrast to the friends of paralyzed man who bring him to Jesus. While religious leaders might be the ones we'd expect to exemplify faith, it is these friends whose faith is noted, and it is because of their faith that Jesus says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." For the first time, Jesus' power is linked to the forgiveness of sins, although this should come as no surprise considering John's ministry.

In Jesus' day there was a strong presumed link between illness and sin. While we do not share this sort of thinking today, perhaps it might be well to think in more holistic terms as we look at Luke's gospel. **How might it be helpful to think of Jesus' power to forgive and to heal as interrelated?**

The calling of Levi extends the controversy that began in the preceding story. Now Jesus is criticized for the company he keeps. Here we begin to get clear signals about the people to whom Jesus is sent. While Levi is called in this passage, he is not among those named among the twelve in 6:12-16. Levi is not one of the twelve but he too “left everything and followed him.” **What significance do you see in a follower outside the twelve “leaving everything” just as Simon and company did in 5:11?**

Is Jesus’ statement that he comes for sinners and not the righteous, troubling for modern Christians?

Controversy continues as Jesus is questioned about his disciples’ lack of fasting. Jesus responds by insisting the joy of his presence precludes fasting for the moment. He also speaks of the incompatibility of old and new, with the clear implication that the Pharisees seek to preserve an old way that is unsuited for the wonderful new ways of the kingdom. **How do we sometimes seek to preserve old ways rather than welcoming the new ways of the kingdom?**

This section of controversy stories concludes with two Sabbath controversies. Both concern “work” on the Sabbath. One is the harvesting and preparing of food while the other is a healing. Jesus does not here simply jettison all notions of Sabbath, but he openly questions whether some practices are adequate for the new days of the kingdom. The need to feed the hungry or help the neighbor seems to trump commands for Sabbath rest. **How do you understand Jesus’ willingness to violate Sabbath rules? What does this mean for your religious practice?**

Now Jesus chooses the twelve, a special inner circle among his followers. But this choice comes only after a night of prayer. **Why do you think Luke so regularly pictures Jesus in fervent prayer?**

Session V Messiah and His Followers

Readings for this session: **Luke 6:17-8:21; 1 Kings 17:8-24**

Exploring the readings

Jesus has collected a large group of followers or disciples, has chosen from them a special twelve, and now begins to teach them in earnest. We are told there is a “great crowd” of disciples along with a “great multitude” of others. These events take place “on a level place.” This poses an interesting contrast to Matthew’s gospel where very similar words are spoken by Jesus in the “Sermon on the Mount.” As a result, Luke 6:17-49 is sometimes referred to as the “Sermon on the Plain.” The most famous section of that “Sermon on the Mount” is likely “The Beatitudes.” Matthew has nine beatitudes. Luke has four beatitudes and four corresponding woes. His four beatitudes mirror four of Matthew’s, but they are handled quite differently. Matthew’s are “spiritualized” compared to Luke’s, leading some to speculate that Matthew domesticated Jesus’ original words, words preserved by Luke. We won’t worry about such speculation, but it is important to listen to Jesus as Luke presents him, without hearing these beatitudes colored by Matthew’s version. Part of that is to recognize that in Luke Jesus speaks in the second person rather than third. It is “Blessed are you...” as opposed to “Blessed are those...”

Before Jesus begins teaching, Luke sets the scene in 6:17-19. Notice that Luke continues to picture Jesus as a charismatic healer who attracts great crowds, some of whom are from Gentile territory. “All” were trying to touch Jesus and gain access to his healing power because it indeed healed “all,” echoing the theme of “salvation to all” (see page 3 of this study).

In v. 20, Jesus looks at his disciples as he begins to speak. Clearly the words that follow are addressed to disciples and, by extension, the Church. As noted earlier, the second person address – “Blessed are you...” – gives Luke’s beatitudes a very different feel from those in Matthew. These are not exhortations to behave in certain ways. They are blessings bestowed on disciples.

While the language of blessing may be familiar to us (we say “Bless you” when someone sneezes and speak of being blessed), I’m not sure we really are comfortable with blessing as anything substantive. Asking a parent’s blessing on a career or marital choice seems at best quaint and more likely anachronistic. Thinking ourselves autonomous individuals, we neither seek blessing nor perceive any real power in it. “The church has abandoned blessing to the charismatics and televangelists. Families have given up the rituals and ceremonies of blessing. Yet, nothing is more important to the development of children than to have their parent’s blessing. Without the sure knowledge of that blessing, children may spend their whole lives seeking approval or the substitutes of success.” (Culpepper, p. 145)

What does the idea of being “blessed” mean to you? What is the significance of being “blessed” for the Christian?

Those who are unfamiliar with Luke's set of beatitudes are often put off and even offended by what they find here. (I recall a very devout, elderly woman in a Sunday School class insisting that Jesus' words in Luke really meant "poor in spirit" rather than simply poor, so offended was she by a literal reading of the words.) And the corresponding woes only add to the affront and impact of Jesus' words. Not only does God prefer the poor but God is badly disposed toward the rich. Matthew sounds a lot more palatable to many American Christians. **How do Jesus' blessings strike you? How do you interpret them?**

Similarly, what do you make of the woes addressed to the rich, full, etc?

Jesus moves from the woe of having all speak well of you to explicit ethical instructions for dealing with those who do not speak well of you. Jesus gives a number of specific examples on loving enemies and concludes by linking such behavior with that of God. **In what ways do Jesus' teachings on discipleship mirror the character and nature of God?**

A related command that disciples forgive and not judge or condemn others (6:37-38) speaks of us being measured in the same way we measure others. (The metaphor employed here likely refers to different sorts of measuring devices known in the marketplace, balances that favored the buyer or seller.) Jesus then concludes these teachings on discipleship with exhortations to work on our own lives of discipleship more than we worry about others'.

One of the earliest Christian confessions seems to have been, "Jesus is Lord." **How do Jesus' words help us understand what this confession means?**

Chapter seven begins the last major section of Luke before the “journey to Jerusalem” begins at 9:51. These chapters focus on Jesus’ identity as Messiah and on how we are to respond to him. The first story, the healing of a centurion’s servant, presents us with both an epitome of Gentile faith (notice the centurion never actually meets Jesus) as well as something of the authority residing in Jesus. In the next story, unique to Luke, Jesus raises the only son of a widow in Nain. The parallels with Elijah’s raising of a widow’s son (1 Kings 17:8-24) are many and significant. **Compare these two stories. What are the parallels? How does Jesus measure up compared with Elijah?**

Now John the Baptist, who has already been connected to Elijah by Luke (1:17), questions whether Jesus is the Messiah. Especially in light of the concluding beatitude in 7:23, Jesus must not have met John’s expectations in some way. Jesus answers John’s question with a list of the work he is doing, each item have explicit connections to Old Testament passages. The concluding beatitude clearly anticipates that many besides John will “take offense.” **Consider that we have four gospels, each presenting slightly different portraits of Jesus. There are also many other popular portraits – Jesus as social revolutionary, charismatic healer, ethical teacher, eschatological prophet, etc. As we encounter new images of Jesus in Scripture, what are some of the ways we find ourselves offended, that Jesus violates our expectations and hopes?**

Jesus then hails John as a great prophet, a prophet whose work was to prepare people for Jesus’ arrival. Though he praises him, Jesus says that the least in the Kingdom is greater than John. **What do you think Jesus means by this?**

Jesus’ concluding comments contrast the stark differences in Jesus and John while noting that people take offense at both. **How is it that such opposites can equally offend the same people? What offensive traits do Jesus and John share in the eyes of the people?**

The story of a sinful woman forgiven is another that is unique to Luke. In it Simon, a Pharisee, is embarrassed first by a sinful woman's shameful display and then by Jesus calling attention to Simon's own lack of hospitality, no small matter in that culture. The story is quite blunt in calling the woman a sinner. This is never in question. The contrast is with Simon, who in labeling her a sinner seems to label himself as righteous. Jesus' statement that someone "to whom little is forgiven loves little," is tough to swallow for good religious folk.

This relationship between loving and being forgiven is a bit confusing. Does the woman love much because she has been forgiven or is she forgiven when she demonstrates much love? Jesus seems to say both things. Clearly one of the main points of this story is the power of Jesus to forgive, something which those in Simon's house do not fail to recognize. But this relationship of love and forgiveness is prominent as well. **Do you think that our ability to love God in a significant way is related to an awareness of being forgiven much? What does your answer say about the nature of our relationship with God?**

Luke now pauses to take note of some women who accompany Jesus and the twelve. This may at first seem a bit of historical trivia with little narrative consequence. But on further reading, these women and the twelve seem to form the first in a pair of brackets, the second being Jesus' mother and brothers. These brackets mark off words which explore how one is to respond upon recognizing that Jesus is indeed Messiah, greater than any prophet.

The center of this section is the so-called parable of the sower. Some have suggested that the different sorts of soil are used by Luke as interpretive guides for different characters within his gospel. Regardless, the gospel is written for the Church so the real interest of the parable is in defining the proper response to Jesus and the word of God. **What are the genuine marks of discipleship according to this parable and Jesus' explanation of it?**

Luke then reports a number of sayings which might have existed independent of one another at one time. As presented, they seem to mitigate any understanding that Jesus wants deliberately to hide or obscure the word of God. But Jesus also insists that only those who listen correctly will discover the treasure of the gospel.

This section then closes with the bracket of mother and brothers. Inasmuch as Christians speak of being brothers and sisters to Christ, these words have significant import for us. **Considering 8:1-21, what does it mean to be a part of Jesus' family?**

Session VI What Sort of Messiah?

Readings for this session: **Luke 8:22-10:24**

Exploring the readings

After pausing in 8:1-21 to reflect on how disciples are to respond to Jesus, Luke now returns to the primary focus of chapters 7-9, exploring the identity of Jesus. Jesus will show his power over nature, over demons, over sickness, and over death. This section will include Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah, the Transfiguration, and predictions of the cross. Then at 9:51, a new section begins where Jesus will "set his face to go to Jerusalem."

The first story we encounter is Jesus stilling the storm. A version of this story occurs in all three synoptic gospels. Likely it was a favorite story of the early Church, and it remains one of the better known gospel stories today. Sometimes people try to make the story metaphorical with the boat as church a favorite allusion. Miracles can be difficult for some modern people, but there is a real danger of stripping the story of its power if we explain away the miraculous element. That does not mean, however, that Luke does not intend for us to see significant symbolism in the story. **What are some things that sea and storm might symbolize, and how might Jesus' power over them be seen as good news?**

If miracles in general trouble modern readers, demon possession is even more problematic. However, Luke's readers assume a very different world view than that of ours, one filled with demons, spirits, angels, and the like. Divine and semi-divine entities were thought responsible for events we would label "natural phenomenon" or call "mental illness." There is no way for Luke to tell this story of a Gerasene demoniac without reference to demons. Culpepper (p. 188) suggests that we should interpret this story "so that it speaks a word of assurance and hope to those for whom every day is a battle with depression, fear, anxiety, or compulsive behavior. They will understand what would lead person to say that his name is 'mob.' With such a response, the man had acknowledged that he no longer had any individual identity. He had lost his name. He had lost his individuality. All that was left was a boiling struggle of conflicting forces. It was as though a Roman legion was at war within him."

While this story clearly establishes Jesus' power over these demons and spirits, we need not believe that schizophrenia is caused by demons to find hope and assurance in this story. **If we assume that the man Jesus helps has mental illness and no demons are actually defeated, how might we speak of God's power at work here in Jesus?**

What do you make of Jesus' instructions to the man after his exorcism?

Most of chapter 8 occurs in all three synoptics, and the story of Jairus' daughter sandwiched around the healing of the woman with hemorrhages is very similar to Mark's original version. The issue of uncleanness is prominent in 8:26-56. The Gerasene demoniac is surely unclean as he lives in tombs and around pigs to boot. The woman with a hemorrhage is unclean as is Jesus once she touches him. And Jesus becomes unclean when he touches the dead body of Jairus' daughter. **Why do you think Luke, and the other synoptics, place this issue so prominently in these stories? What point might they be making?**

Why do you think Jesus makes a point of locating the woman with the hemorrhage? Why not simply let her be healed in secret?

Similarly, why does Jesus tell Jairus' family to keep quiet? (Note: Luke does not share Mark's passion for keeping Jesus' identity a secret.)

Chapter 9, in different ways, continues to explore Jesus' identity. It begins with Jesus sending out the twelve. While the tendency may be to focus on Jesus' instructions to the disciples, this episode provides more information about who Jesus is. **What do we learn about Jesus from in 9:1-6?**

Herod's curiosity about Jesus is placed between Jesus commissioning the 12 and his feeding of the 5000, immediately followed by Peter's confession that Jesus is Messiah. It is perhaps instructive that questions of identity, and Peter's confession, are set in the context of mission and Jesus providing for people. **Reflecting on this context, do you think it is possible to "know" Jesus apart from engaging in the mission of the Church? Why or why not?**

What does the feeding miracle itself say about Jesus' identity?

The confession of Peter is a kind of high point, yet he is far from understanding who Jesus really is. He understands that Jesus is God's Messiah, but who does not understand what that actually means or entails. And so Jesus begins to teach his disciples that he must suffer and die. At this point Luke leaves out Peter's rebuke of Jesus that is found in Mark and repeated in Matthew. In Luke, Jesus' words that would be followers deny themselves and take up a cross are not said in response to Peter's misunderstanding. They are connected directly to Jesus' words about his own suffering and death. Luke seems to make an explicit connection between the person of Jesus and the life of discipleship. **Do you think that a correct understanding of discipleship grows out of a correct understanding of the person of Jesus? In what way? How might a different understandings of Jesus lead to different pictures of discipleship?**

Now follows a genuine "mountaintop experience." In Luke's version of the Transfiguration, Jesus goes up the mountain to pray, apparently at night. Notice how this event is some ways prefigures Gethsemane, complete with sleepy disciples and discussion of Jesus' "departure" at Jerusalem. There are also echoes of Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son..." along with the connection to Scripture via Elijah and Moses. Surely this is the sort of faith building experience many of us long for. If only we could have things so clearly laid out for us. If only God would speak so clearly to us. And yet Peter, James, and John do not seem to be much transformed by this experience. They still do not understand about the cross. They will soon be arguing about which of them is greatest, and Peter still denies Jesus. Peter's desire to memorialize the event with three "dwellings" says that he realizes this is an important moment, but his plan seems more a desire to remain on the mountaintop than any realization of the meaning of Jesus' messiahship. **In today's religion culture with great interest in spirituality, spiritual retreats, and mystical experiences, what warnings about spiritual mountaintops might we draw from this story?**

Luke is much friendlier in his portrayal of the disciples than is Mark, but in 9:41, Jesus sounds thoroughly exasperated with them. They are still far from ready to be his witnesses in the world. This is confirmed by the failure to comprehend Jesus' second prediction of his passion, their argument about greatness, and their trying to control others who heal in Jesus' name. But Jesus is not giving up on his disciples. He will continue to be with them and teach them and finally empower them to be faithful witnesses. Jesus' work with his disciples takes a critical turn as "he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus has told his disciples that he must suffer and die, the following him means self-denial and a cross. Now he very deliberately embraces his cross.

Just as Jesus' ministry began with his rejection at Nazareth, the turn toward Jerusalem begins with rejection by a Samaritan village. We have seen many connections to Elijah in Luke's

gospel and they continue here. Jesus sending messengers ahead of him alludes to John the Baptist who is the messenger sent ahead, Elijah returned. In addition, Elijah had confronted the king of Samaria and when he sent messengers to fetch Elijah, the prophet called down fire from heaven to consume them. (See 2 Kings 1:10, 12) But when the disciples suggest acting as Elijah did (a few ancient manuscripts actually have the line “as Elijah did” in 9:54), Jesus rebukes them. **Why does Jesus react so strongly against the James and John’s suggestion?**

The turn toward Jerusalem provides the setting for more information on the meaning of discipleship. We meet several would be followers of Jesus. In each case Jesus points to the difficulty of and absolutely loyalty required for disciples. The third case again has allusions to Elijah who called Elisha from plowing in the field to be his disciple and eventual replacement. There Elijah permits Elisha to go and kiss his parents and say goodbye before returning to follow Elijah. But Jesus will permit no such delays. Recalling the Semitic penchant for hyperbole mitigates the harshness of Jesus’ words a bit. Still the demand is stark. **What is Jesus telling us by these words about the nature of following him?**

The mission of the seventy (seventy-two in some manuscripts) parallels the mission of the twelve and is unique to Luke. Some of the commands in this commissioning are easy enough to understand. Nothing should distract them from their mission, not possessions or desire for improving their lot. More difficult are the woes spoken against certain towns. It seems likely that these words in some way reflect the rejection of Jesus by Judaism as a whole, an event which will propel the Church’s movement into the Gentile world.

Some have suggested that by having a second missionary group outside the twelve, Luke makes clear that the Church’s mission is the work, not of a special, select few, but of all disciples. **In an era when missionaries are paid specialists, what warnings may Luke be giving to us? Can we be the Church if most of us are not part of its mission?**

The success of the seventy further reveals who Jesus is. The demons submit to these disciples and Jesus speaks of Satan’s fall from power. Jesus also clearly states that he is able to share his relationship to the Father with those who follow him. As Jesus moves toward Jerusalem and the cross, he rejoices that already the grip of sin and death is being broken, foreshadowing sin’s ultimate defeat.

Session VII Loving God and Neighbor

Readings for this session: **Luke 10:25-13:30**

Exploring the readings

When the seventy return from their mission, Jesus praises God “because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” In the episodes that follow, lawyers (referring to experts of religious law), Pharisees, priests, and even woman doing her household chores, come in for Jesus’ criticism. This begins as a lawyer comes to Jesus, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus turns the question back on the asker who correctly quotes from Scripture, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” This conversation is reported in Matthew and Mark as well, though in Mark the lawyer is praised by Jesus for his answer and in Matthew it is Jesus who gives the answer. Only Luke has the lawyer seek to “justify himself,” presumably by trying to limit who qualifies as “neighbor.” This prompts one of Jesus’ most beloved parables, found only in Luke.

The parable is fairly straight forward, though it can be misunderstood. Some people explain the priest and Levite’s actions by saying that they were going to the temple and could not risk defiling themselves, but the parable itself eliminates that possibility. It begins with the man “going down from Jerusalem,” and tells us that the priest was “going down” that road. In Jewish thought, one can only go down *from* Jerusalem. Not only is it located on a high hill, but its symbolism elevates it even higher. The word “down” can only refer to leaving Jerusalem, and so the priest and, presumably, the Levite are leaving their duties, not going to them.

You may have noticed that the parable doesn’t really answer the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” **What point do you think Jesus is making to this lawyer by the way his answers his question?**

The parable of the Samaritan features an unexpected hero. The story of Martha and Mary that follows also features the unexpected. In reading this story, it is important to remember the place of women in that culture, and to realize that sitting at the feet of a rabbi is the pose of a disciple, a role reserved for men. **With this in mind, how might we understand this story?**

In the next section Jesus, again presented in the pose of prayer, is asked by his disciple for instruction in prayer. While this is a very different topic than covered in the previous section, Jesus’ model prayer relates directly to the command to love God and neighbor found here. God as Father speaks of loving relationship and forgiving others is a way of loving neighbor. The Lord’s Prayer has been used so often in worship and other settings that the significance of its

words are often lost. **Looking at those words, what do Jesus' instructions say about our relationship to God as well as the nature of God?**

Jesus' words following the Lord's Prayer need to be heard in the context of that prayer. Jesus is not promising that God will give us anything we ask for. Rather he is assuring us that God is kindly disposed toward our prayers, a loving parent who is much more inclined to do good for us than we are to care for our own children.

The scene shifts abruptly as Jesus again amazes a crowd by casting out a demon who kept a man mute. But there are those who suspect that Jesus' power derives from some sort of deal with the devil. Jesus answers with a proverb about a house divided and the metaphor a strong man overpowering another. Jesus' defense gives us some more insight into his work as Messiah/Son of God. **According to these verses, what has Jesus come to do?**

Jesus' comments about the unclean spirit returning connects with what he has just said, especially the line about those not with him being against him (v. 23). In the conflict against evil, neutrality is not possible. (It is this context of a battle with evil that allows Jesus to say what sounds almost the opposite of what he says in 9:50.) Even if Jesus casts out a demon something must prevent its return. This provides a segue to another beatitude. When a woman praises Jesus by blessing his mother (effectively saying that Jesus is so wonderful that his existence blesses Mary) Jesus insists that there is a much greater blessing. He does not rebuke the woman, but his beatitude may just explain how one keeps the unclean spirit from returning, how one is with Jesus rather than against him. **How does one do this?**

Jesus is still addressing the crowd's response to his exorcising the mute man when he speaks of the sign of Jonah and the eye as the lamp of the body. (Jesus employs an archaic understanding of sight. Ancient Jews and Romans thought that vision occurred when the eye cast its light onto objects outside it. Vision diminished with age as the light inside the eye became weaker, hence the phrase, "My eyes have grown dim.") Verses 11:14-36 present and critique various responses to encountering God's grace in Jesus. **What problems does Jesus encounter? How should people respond? How are we supposed to respond?**

The scene now shifts to dinner at a Pharisee's home which becomes the occasion for a pair of woes, one for Pharisees and one for lawyers. The controversy begins when Jesus' host is stunned that Jesus doesn't wash prior to eating. Jesus responds with metaphors of cup and dish, clean on the outside but filthy on the inside before speaking woes against the Pharisee's hypocrisy. In v. 41, the NIV provides more interpretation than translation, "But give what is inside the dish to the poor." Neither the word "poor" nor "dish" are in the Greek. The NRSV is a literal translation. "So give for alms those things that are within."

Is easy to dismiss this controversy as directed at folks very unlike us, but hypocrisy is always a problem for religious people. **Look at this passage and keep in mind Jesus' words in 11:14-36. What are ways in which we can get caught up in hypocrisy like that of the Pharisee and the lawyers?**

The controversy with the Pharisees prompts a section of teachings for disciples (12:1-13:9), all of which address a theme of readiness for coming judgment. Any who think following Jesus will be all fun and games will quickly be dissuaded by these verses. One possible way of viewing 12:1-34 is to think of it as a discussion on what animates and motivates one's life. What drives us to act as we do? What are the preeminent desires, fears, hopes, etc. that shape our action? **Look at verses 1-34 and then contrast how Jesus calls us to order our lives with the ways in which we actually do.**

In his commentary, Culpepper (p. 261) says, "Followers of Jesus should be the freest persons..." Reflect on the ways in which our lives are free and in which they are still captive.

12:35-48 clearly calls us to live in readiness for Jesus' return. Implied in the section is the notion of vocation, the idea that we each are servants who have been given work to do by our Master. **What are our vocations, our calls?**

Jesus' warning that he brings division, pitting parent against child and sibling against sibling is troubling to many. **How do you understand this warning?**

Jesus' words in 12:54-13:9 all speak of people's ability, or lack thereof, to read and "interpret the present time." Although people seem to be quite good at interpreting the signs of events from their everyday lives, they are much less attuned to signs of the kingdom. And when they do attempt to interpret signs such as other's suffering, that get it wrong. **In what ways do we share these folks' inability "to interpret the present time," and in what ways do we correctly read them?**

The following story about healing a woman on the Sabbath at first seems unnecessary. Jesus' credentials as a healer are well established, and he has already healed on the Sabbath and engaged in Sabbath controversy (6:1-11). But surely Luke is too careful a writer simply to throw in another healing story because he has one available. Additionally, this story follows a long section that speaks of watchfulness and readiness for the kingdom, along with knowing how to read the signs. This healing story is also followed by teachings on the nature of the kingdom. **With this in mind, what elements do you find in this story that help us more fully understand the kingdom?**

Next Jesus compares the kingdom to a mustard seed and to yeast. **What does Jesus mean by this and what significance does it have for our lives?**

Jesus is then asked how many will make it into this kingdom. Jesus does not give a direct answer, and it is easy to misread what he says. **Carefully read Jesus' response from 13:24-30. Will few or a large number enter the kingdom? What are the surprising things about those who do enter?**

Session VIII The Kingdom and Its Citizens

Readings for this session: **Luke 13:31-16:31**

Exploring the readings

As our reading opens, we see a friendlier portrait of the Pharisees who warn Jesus of Herod's desire to kill him. Jesus seems unconcerned with "that fox" Herod. He has work to do and must be on his way, not because he fears death, but because he must die a prophet's death in Jerusalem. The mention of Jerusalem prompts Jesus' lament over that city. A similar lament is in Matthew 23, occurring after Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into the city. Jesus' lament hangs heavy with the specter of judgment. ("See, your house is left to you.") But Jesus also speaks of his desire to care for and protect Jerusalem, using the image of a mother hen guarding her chicks. This image is rendered more striking by that of Herod as a fox. **Reflect on the meaning of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, especially in light of the fox and hen imagery.**

14:1-24 contains three separate elements (a healing, sayings on humility, and a parable) which are tied together by the setting of a meal. (This is the third Sabbath healing in Luke.) This setting serves to hold everything together and to connect the first two elements to the parable of the great banquet as Luke shifts from teaching us about Jesus' identity to teaching us about the nature of the Kingdom and its citizens.

The healing of the man with dropsy raises the issue of what sort of good takes precedence. The Pharisees were very zealous in keeping the Law, something they pursued out of a genuine, deep devotion to God. They were not rigid ritualists. They would never have allowed someone to die rather than "work" on the Sabbath. But the man with dropsy is in no immediate danger. He could just as well have been healed the next day. As such, the Pharisees considered that the command to keep the Sabbath took precedence over the need to help the neighbor. **What does Jesus' violation of this reasoning say about the nature of the Kingdom he inaugurates?**

What do Jesus' sayings about humility and hospitality in 14:7-14 say about the nature of the Kingdom?

The final piece of this unit is the parable of the Great Banquet. Luke version of this parable is quite different from Matthew's, and there is no point in trying to harmonize them. Matthew

and Luke have some different points to make. Notice in the parable that there are no sinners or righteous folks per se. **Consider those who “get in” to the banquet and those who don’t. What explains why some are in and some out?**

In 14:25-35, Jesus speaks very bluntly about the cost of discipleship. The line about hating mother, father, wife, etc. is Middle Eastern hyperbole, where “hating” family really means “loving Jesus more.” Nonetheless, Jesus clearly considers following him a difficult task, one with demands so significant that any would be followers should carefully consider whether or not they can make such a commitment. Modern Americans often hold the mistaken impression that following Jesus fits easily into middle class American values. But even a cursory reading of the gospels should dispel such notions, making Jesus’ words more than a little uncomfortable for us. **What are the costs that we should carefully consider before offering ourselves as disciples? What are the ways in which Jesus’ call put us at odds with our world?**

All of chapter 15 deals with a common theme, recovery of what is lost and the resultant joy and celebration. Three parables are linked together in response to the charge that Jesus welcomes and eats with sinners. The first two are a pair, simple and straight forward. The third is much more elaborate. Only the parable of the lost sheep is found outside of Luke.

The first two parables make an identical point. The small value of the coin in the second parable perhaps provides further understanding on what is valued in the Kingdom. **What picture of God emerges from these parables of the Kingdom?**

Is it easier to join the joy in heaven or to grumble and mutter with the Pharisees?

The third parable is commonly referred to as that of “the Prodigal Son,” although “prodigal” might equally be applied to the father in the story. Unlike the preceding pair, this parable has many facets, touching on basic human experience of family, sibling rivalry, youthful rebelliousness and indiscretion, and so on. It is a parable with many layers of meaning. Looking at it variously from the viewpoint of younger son, father, and elder brother will confirm this.

This is a parable and not an allegory, but certainly the father is meant to give us some insight into the heart of God and the workings of God’s kingdom. What are some of these?

Looking at both brothers, what are some different ways in which relationships are damaged and broken? Think of both human relationships and relationship with God.

The parable ends with the unresolved question of whether the elder brother will come to the party. This recalls the original upset of the Pharisees over those with whom Jesus eats and parties. **Do you think the elder brother will come inside? What might keep him out? What might allow him to go in?**

We now move from a section connected by a dinner table setting to one tied together by the issue of riches. Two parables surround Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees, who are described as "lovers of money." The first parable is also linked to the parable of the prodigal that precedes it by both lead characters having "squandered his property." The parable of the dishonest manager, however, is much more difficult to interpret since the manager is rewarded for shrewd and seemingly dishonest behavior. Some have argued that the manager's lessening of the debt to creditors comes from removing the interest charge (interest was against Jewish law) or taking out his own commission. On balance, however, such an interpretation seems driven mostly by a desire that Jesus not praise the manager's dishonesty.

The turning point in parable (as well as in the parable of the prodigal and the rich fool [12:17-19]) is an internal conversation. The manager asks himself, "What will I do?" He then uses the wealth at his disposal to insure his future. His actions have the desired effect, and Jesus tells us to emulate him. (The NRSV translation of "dishonest wealth" in 16:9 and 16: 11 is highly preferable to the NIV's "worldly wealth.") **In what ways do you think Jesus wants us to be like this dishonest manager? (Answering this question will be much more difficult if you allegorize the parable and make the rich man God.)**

Jesus' concluding comments in 16:10-13 call us to be faithful with whatever is at our disposal. Faithfulness is not a matter of how much you have, but how you employ it. It is often not a matter of the spectacular but the mundane. **What are ways that each of us can be faithful stewards?**

According to Luke, it is the Pharisees' love of money that leads them to dismiss what Jesus has just said and, in return, leads to Jesus to address them. The comments in vv. 15-18, as well as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus are responses to the Pharisees and their love of money (although it is unclear exactly how the note of divorce fits in). It seems likely that the Pharisees understand wealth as a blessing from God. Perhaps they also see poverty as a curse, and they have scripture they can cite to back this (see Deuteronomy 28). Modern Christians often seem to agree with the Pharisees. We speak of our wealth and possessions as "blessings." But Jesus insists that scripture supports his view on wealth. (Remember, scripture for Jesus and the Pharisees means out Old Testament.) **What is your understanding of the Bible's take on wealth? How are people of faith to relate to money and possessions?**

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (the only named character in Jesus' parables) pulls from Jesus' comments on the first parable, "You cannot serve God and wealth," and from the reference to the law and the prophets in the sayings to the Pharisees. The parable serves as the culmination of Luke's prophetic witness against wealth.

There is a chiasmic construction here (from the Greek letter chi, X). A rich man is described followed by Lazarus. We then see both men in reverse order, Lazarus first then the rich man. Outlined, this takes on an A. B. B. ' A. ' structure. This chiasmic construction emphasizes the inversion that has taken place. In a sense, this parable dramatically pictures what was spoken by Mary in the Magnificat and what was spoken by Jesus in his blessings and woes of 6:20-26.

Following the chiasm that forms the two opening sections of the parable is a concluding section consisting of a narrative between Abraham and the rich man. Modern readers may assume that Abraham is in heaven and the rich man in hell, but the parable does not say this. More likely the parable reflects popular understanding of the time in which the dead went to Hades to await final judgment, with Hades divided into sections for good and bad. Another possibility is that Abraham and Lazarus are in "paradise," a place of bliss in Jewish thought. But neither of these possibilities is "in heaven."

It seems likely that in this parable directed at the Pharisees, the rich man shares their theological understanding of wealth. **Reflect on the warnings contained in this parable, taking into consideration Jesus' words about serving God and wealth spoken earlier in chapter 16.**

The parable ends by saying that the law and the prophets were more than sufficient to have kept the rich man from his fate and to prevent his brothers from replicating it. In fact, if they will not listen to Moses or the prophets, they will not listen even if someone rises from the dead. **What is the problem here? Why would people listen neither to the law and prophets nor to one who rose from the dead?**

Session IX Almost to Jerusalem

Readings for this session: **Luke 17:1-19:27**

Exploring the readings

Luke 17:1-10 functions as a single unit, with the parable in verses 7-10 looking back to the teachings in 1-6. These teachings are for disciples or insiders, and so they are addressed directly to us. The demands on the disciples lead them to ask for more faith, but Jesus assures them that the tiniest amount of faith is more than enough for the job at hand. The demands of discipleship include repeated forgiveness and care that they not cause a “little one” to stumble. “Little ones” seem to mean those who are just coming to the faith or who are struggling to come to faith. To hinder this process is a grievous sin in Jesus’ mind.

After stating the difficult demands on a disciple, then stating that faith will allow them to meet these demands, Jesus tells a short parable about slaves and their master. This is likely not many people’s favorite parable. **Why does Jesus insist that we view ourselves as worthless slaves even if we meet the hard demands of discipleship?**

The scene shifts again to the journey to Jerusalem, which provides the occasion for a healing. This is not simply a healing story, however. It has other interests. There is an interesting use of the verb “to see” in this story. Jesus “saw” the men with leprosy and the Samaritan “saw he was healed.” We might think these are just Luke’s way of reporting the events, but given how often Luke’s Jesus speaks of the blessings related to seeing and hearing, sight takes on a heightened significance. Additionally, the parable of the Good Samaritan also features a lot of “seeing.” Samaritan, priest, and Levite all “see” the man in the ditch. **Pay close attention to the notion of “seeing,” what is this story trying to tell us?**

Jesus’ earlier words about faith “the size of a mustard seed” told the disciples that they did not really understand the nature of faith. Now Jesus lets the Pharisees know that they do not really understand the nature of the kingdom of God. They seek a timetable and Jesus answers with a statement about its immediacy as well as the need to be prepared for a future “days of the Son of Man.” In a sense, Jesus says that the kingdom is both future and present.

When Jesus speaks of the kingdom’s present status in 17:21, he says the kingdom “is among you.” The Greek word translated “among” is very rare in the New Testament, occurring elsewhere only in Matthew 23:26, and there is debate about how to best translate it. The word can mean “among” or “in the midst of” as the NRSV translates, or it can mean “within” as the

NIV translates. The problem with the “within” translation is that it seems to fit the context poorly. The “you” in verse 21 is plural which seems to argue for the kingdom’s presence in the midst of you. And Jesus’ words about the kingdom coming in the future make clear that he cannot be simply locating inside of us. Perhaps the biggest argument in favor of “among” is the fact that the “within” reading so easily leads to a spiritualizing and personalizing of the Kingdom which is clearly contrary to Jesus’ teachings.

Thus it seems that Jesus tells the Pharisees that the Kingdom is in some way already present around them (as perhaps witnessed by the healing immediately prior), and it has a more vivid reality that is yet to come. Notice that the words about the future coming are addressed to disciples. As disciples, we are to live aware of the Kingdom’s present reality, but also to live in vivid anticipation of its future arrival. There is far too much Christian and popular fascination with timetables regarding the end, but Jesus here doesn’t speak of a timetable. Using examples from the Old Testament, Noah and Lot, Jesus says something about how the world will look when the day does come. **How will the world look to the casual observer at the end of the age?**

Giving that the Son of Man’s coming will take the world by surprise, what is required of those who follow Jesus?

Jesus’ approach to Jerusalem makes issues of the Kingdom more immediate and pressing. Having addressed questions about its timetable, the final section before Jerusalem focuses on the issue of the Kingdom’s relationship to rich, poor, and privileged. The opening parable of a needy widow serves as a sort of bridge or transition and speaks to disciples living in the interim before the Son of Man’s return. This is the first of two parables which contrast two very different characters, judge and widow followed by Pharisee and tax collector.

The first parable clearly addresses the situation of disciples who are in dire situations and cry out for justice. It is a parable urging them to hold to their faith. After all, if an evil judge can grant justice because of a widow’s persistence, surely a loving God will hear the persistent cries of beloved children. The widow serves as a metaphor, but she is also a reminder that God cares especially for the widow and orphan, that justice for her is important to God.

The parable closes with a warning of sorts. Jesus wonders whether, upon his return, he will find faith on earth. **What is the meaning of this warning?**

The next parable pairs Pharisee and tax collector. Notice that this parable is addressed to people who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” This parable again features the regular theme of reversal. Contrast the content of the two men’s prayers. **What are some of the important differences and what significance do you see in them?**

A pair of parables is followed by a pair of encounters, first with children then and a rich ruler. The children and ruler’s relation to the kingdom or eternal life are contrasted and again we see an inversion from expected norms. With the children, the disciples rebuke parents who are bringing their babies to Jesus. **Why do you think the disciples try to prevent this?**

When Jesus countermands his disciples, he addresses the children directly rather than their parents. “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” Jesus goes on to insist that all must receive the Kingdom as a little child. **People in Jesus’ day did not have romanticized notions of children or childhood. What then do you think it means for the Kingdom to belong to children and for us to receive it as children?**

The approach of the children is immediately followed by the rich ruler asking about the requirements for eternal life. Jesus recalls the commandments for him, and he responds that he has always observed these. There is no reason to doubt the man, and Jesus does not seem to. In Jewish thought, this man is not claiming to be perfect, only claiming that he has diligently tried to follow the Law. With that fact presumed as true, Jesus tells he lacks one thing and tells him to sell all and follow. **Why can the man not comply? Would we have done as Jesus said?**

The third prediction of Jesus’ passion comes next. It is filled with images of violence which Jesus apparently plans to accept willingly. **Despite the disciples’ inability to understand, are there instructions for disciples to be found here regarding violence?**

We are now almost to Jerusalem. But first come two events in Jericho and a final parable. The first event is the healing of a blind man. While a fairly straightforward healing miracle, it does feature the blind man's cry, "Have mercy on me!" along with the attempts of others to hush him. This is also the first narration of Jesus healing a blind person. **Why do you think Luke tells us about crowd's attempt to silence the man? And what special symbolism might be connected to the receiving of sight?**

Next follows the well-known story of Zacchaeus, another account unique to Luke. Zacchaeus is a "chief tax collector." That means he held a contract with the Romans. He had a specific amount the Romans required (payable in advance) and he then could use Roman resources to collect from the people. Obviously the plan was to collect enough for some profit, and the system seemed almost designed for abuse and corruption. Thus it was assumed that all tax collectors were cheats. Plus, they were collaborators with the Romans.

Zacchaeus' story has connections to the parable in 18:9-14 ("all who humble themselves will be exalted") and to the story of the rich ruler. Zacchaeus humbles himself both by climbing the tree and by his promise to both give away half he has and repay anyone he has defrauded. Jesus' statement that "**Today** (emphasis mine) salvation has come to this house," points to the present work of the Kingdom. God is at work now. Newness can be found now. **What are some of the elements of this story that make it such a hopeful one?**

This section ends with a very difficult parable, told because Jesus "was near Jerusalem," and because people were expecting an immediate appearance of the Kingdom. Understanding this parable is made all the more difficult because of our familiarity with Matthew's similar parable known as the parable of the talents. But despite the similarities, the parables are very different and have very different meanings. In his commentary, Culpepper (p. 360) offers what may be a very helpful hint for understanding it by the name he gives it, "The Parable of the Greedy and Vengeful King." We are prone to make the king in the parable a God or Jesus figure, but it may be that this is not the case. The people of Luke's day would have been familiar with several instances where "a nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself." In fact Herod had done just that, and we know he is not an admirable character in Luke. **If we take the king as a negative example, what sort of insights might we draw? (Remember that Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem as a "king.")**

Session X In Jerusalem, at the Temple

Readings for this session: **Luke 19:28-21:38**

Exploring the readings

After the long journey that began at 9:51, Jesus finally arrives at his destination. Many of us are familiar with the events of “Palm Sunday,” but each gospel treats Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem in different ways. And so we will do well to carefully read what Luke says, putting aside, for the moment, information from other gospels.

The events of Jesus’ entry are filled with references to Old Testament passages. You may want to look at some of them: Zechariah 14:4 speaks of the Mount of Olives and its connection to the coming age; Genesis 49:10-11 and Zechariah 9:9-10 speak of a donkey and the foal of a donkey; 2 Kings 9:13 describes garments spread on the ground during a royal procession; “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” is drawn from Psalm 118:26; Habakkuk 2:9-11 speaks of the stones crying out. Luke clearly wants Jesus’ entrance to speak of divine fulfillment, of God’s unfolding purpose.

Notice who does the spreading of cloaks on the road and who shouts words of praise. The first line of this shout (Blessed is the king ...) comes from Psalm 118, but Luke has changed the word “one” to “king.” He has also added a second line (Peace in heaven, and glory...) which may remind us of the angels’ praise from Luke 2:14. This is clearly a big event, an emotional parade. **What do you think is going through his followers’ minds as they escort Jesus into the city?**

Given Jesus’ choice of a steed and the sort of people he has been attracting, what does this parade look like?

Any hopes the disciples may have that the entry into Jerusalem will inaugurate a wonderful new age are tempered by what happens once the parade is over. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, lamenting her upcoming destructions because she did not “recognize the things that make for peace!” Jesus predicts the coming destruction of the city, accomplished in 70 CE, a fact well known to the first readers of Luke. Since Jesus has already lamented over Jerusalem back in 13:31-35, this is not a big surprise to the reader, but there is irony and paradox here. Jesus, the king who comes to bring peace, weeps of Jerusalem’s impending destruction because its inhabitants will not accept the “things that make for peace.” **What are these things?**

Luke's first readers would have been very familiar with a king or ruler making a grand procession into a city. Normally these processions would go to the temple where sacrifices were offered. Jesus follows this pattern by going to the temple, but his first action there is to "drive out those who were selling things there." Luke's account of the temple cleansing is abbreviated compared to Mark and Matthew, reported in a single verse. **Remembering the typical ancient pattern of a ruler or king entering a city then going to the temple, what do Jesus' entry and cleansing of the temple say about the sort of king he is?**

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus leaves the city immediately follow the temple cleansing, but Luke does not mention this. He instead reports, "Every day he was teaching in the temple." This depicts the temple cleansing less as a flash point that spurs the plot to kill Jesus and more as Jesus claiming the temple for his (and therefore God's) work. Everything that happens until the Passion narrative itself will now take place in the temple. This section (19:47-21:38) is clearly bracketed off by parallel statements in 19:47-48 and 21:37-38. In both sets of statements and in the events in between, "the people" are contrasted with the priests, scribes, and leaders.

Following Jesus' cleansing of the temple, the people in charge (chief priests, scribes, and elders) want to know what gives Jesus the right to do these things. After all, he has disrupted the normal activities at the temple. The authority of those questioning Jesus was clear. For priests it was hereditary, for scribes a matter of education and knowledge, and the "leaders of the people" had their rank by virtue of social and economic status. These people with recognized authority demand to know from where Jesus derives his. His response is to ask these religious authorities about the authority of another figure, John the Baptist. Their refusal to answer would have brought them shame, but they apparently prefer that to the fallout from actually answering the question. **What does their refusal to answer say about what authority they do recognize? How are questions of authority an issue for us today?**

Jesus will now "tell the people" a parable. At its end the scribes and priests will realize that he "told this parable against them." Here Luke intensifies the break between leaders and people. Early hearers of this parable would likely have made a connection to the song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, which spoke judgment on Jerusalem. This parable recalls that the prophets have often been stoned and killed, that those who speak for God often get a poor reception, most recently John the Baptist. Now the beloved son will be killed.

The tenants of the temple have clearly misunderstood and abused their status. Now they will incur judgment. **If we bring the parable forward to our day, who are the tenants, and to whom might the vineyard be given?**

The leaders (think rich, powerful, important, influential) are determined to be rid of Jesus. They now employ deception and “spies” in an attempt to entrap Jesus. (Not unlike modern political operatives.) Jesus sees through their craftiness and outwits them with his well-known “render unto Caesar...” The statement is not meant to define church state relations in any practical way, but it does make a profound statement about loyalties through the use of the word “image.” (The NRSV says “head” and the NIV “portrait”) This is the same word used in the Greek version of Genesis where humans are made in God’s “image.” **If a denarius belongs to the emperor because his image is on it, what does that say about us?**

Next come questions from the Sadducees. Little is known about this group and they appear in Luke only here. They seem to have had close ties with the priestly and aristocratic classes and to have been at odds with the Pharisees on many issues. It is not clear whether they are part of the attempts to trap Jesus or if they simply ask him a genuine question, but their question gives Jesus an opportunity to say something about the nature of resurrection. The “proof” of resurrection that Jesus offers in 20:37-38 may not sound all that convincing to us, but it is a standard form of rabbinic interpretation. Perhaps more interesting to us are Jesus’ statements on the nature of resurrection, i.e. “neither marry nor are given in marriage...”

Attempts to draw any literal picture of the next age from Jesus’ words will likely be fruitless. However, we may have more luck drawing inferences about the ways in which this age and the age to come are different. **What inferences about resurrection life or life in “the age to come” can you draw from Jesus’ words?**

The question about “David’s son” suddenly appears without warning or context. Jesus simply objects to the title. **Rabbinic logic aside (see question above), why might Jesus want to reject the title, “Son of David?”**

In 20:45-47, Jesus condemns the scribes in the hearing of “all the people,” perhaps further accentuating the gap between leaders and people. The scribes’ behavior resonates with behavior Jesus has earlier condemned, both in their exalting themselves and in their pursuit of wealth. **What sorts of warnings might present day religious people take from Jesus’ words?**

The so-called story of “the widow’s mite” is well known to many, yet it is still challenging to Christians who are financially well off. **Is it possible for those who are well off to give in a manner similar to the widow?**

A remark about the beauty of the temple prompts Jesus to predict its destruction (which occurred in 70 CE). This prompts a discussion about the end times. Some obviously assume the temple’s destruction will be associated with the end. But Jesus warns Christians away from trying to anticipate the end, a perennial temptation for religious folk. All sorts of things that might look like the end will happen and not be the end. **If trying to interpret the signs is not the work of the Christian, what is?**

Biblical prophecies of judgment are nearly always calls to repentance. Jesus’ prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction likely functions that way as well. Rejection of God’s ways, of the “things that make for peace,” has consequences. By the time of Luke’s writing, Jerusalem has been destroyed. And so a known event serves as a fulfilled prophetic warning to those who would live as if there is no judgment.

Jesus then speaks of his return or of the coming of the Son of Man. This day is not heralded by any events that we are used to seeing like wars and rumors of wars. Rather there will be unmistakable cosmic signs, as easy to interpret as the coming of summer. The emphasis here is not on figuring out the time, but on assuring the faithful that they will see the day of the Lord, the day of their redemption. Jesus’ warning to “be on guard” in 21:34 is a call to continued faithfulness in the face of adversity, something many early Christians understood well.

Very often, speaking of the end times and of Jesus’ return has been abandoned by mainline churches, turned over to denominations and groups that like to focus on biblical prophecy. **What are some ways that we mainline Protestants might reclaim the biblical teachings on the coming of the Son of Man? After all, they are an important element of Jesus’ Jerusalem teachings.**

Luke 21:37-38 brings this section that began at 19:47 to a close. The time for teaching is over. Now the events of Jesus’ passion will unfold.

Session XI Passover, Arrest, and Trial

Readings for this session: **Luke 22:1-23:25**

Exploring the readings

As we move into the story of the Passover and Jesus' Passion, we travel over familiar roads. With familiar Bible passages such as these, we do well carefully to focus on what a particular gospel, in this case Luke, is saying. Putting aside information from Matthew, John, or Mark (for the moment) may help us to see important points Luke is trying to make.

As this section of Luke opens, we again hear that the leaders are looking to kill Jesus, but "the people" are an impediment to their plans. Then "Satan entered into Judas." **Think back through the gospel. When was the last time we saw Satan or the devil at work? What significance is there to Satan's role in what is about to happen?**

How are we to understand Luke's report that "Satan entered Judas?" Is Judas merely a pawn? What about human free will?

The preparations for the Passover meal are given in some detail. Luke follows Mark's account closely, though he has Jesus, rather than the disciples, initiate the discussion on preparations. (He also names Peter and John, who are unnamed in Mark. Likely this foreshadows Acts, where Peter and John will be the prominent leaders of the early Church.) **Given that Luke might just as easily have written, "On the day the Passover lambs were slain, Jesus and his apostles gathered in an upper room to eat the Passover meal," what are some possible reasons for reporting the planning for the meal?**

The three gospel accounts instituting the Lord's Supper (John does not have one), along with Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, all vary somewhat. Luke, for example, has two different cups in the supper; one before the bread and one after (although some ancient copies of Luke don't contain verse 20 at all). The layers of meaning and significance in the report of this meal are so many that we can barely scratch the surface in this class. One important theme is the very strong connection to Passover itself, a theme in all four gospels. **Why is it important to connect the Supper to Passover?**

Twice during the Passover meal, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God, saying he “will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God,” and “not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” **What meaning and understanding do you see in these two explicit references to the coming of the Kingdom?**

Consider Luke’s account of the Last Supper and reflect on what meaning we should find in our celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

As the meal concludes, Jesus announces that he will be betrayed. Look at the response of the disciples to this announcement. (Compare John 13:22 for a very different response.) **What insights into our own hearts might we learn from the disciples’ reaction to this news?**

The disciples’ questions about who would betray Jesus quickly shift. From questions of who is the worst disciple, the topic turns to who is greatest. The world insists on hierarchies where some wield power over others. But Jesus insists that this cannot be the way of those who follow him. This failure of the disciples is mitigated in Luke by Jesus words in 22:28-30.

Jesus now addresses Simon Peter. It seems Satan has asked for all the disciples, not just Judas. This echoes Old Testament notions of Satan as a kind of prosecuting attorney. But Jesus has interceded on the disciples’ behalfs, praying that their faith would not fail. **Look carefully at these verses. Jesus already knows Peter will deny him, so why is he still praying for him?**

Next Jesus gives some final instructions to the disciples. He recalls the instructions giving earlier in 9:3 and 10:4 where no provisions were to be taken along. But now provisions and even protection is required. (Apparently swords were standard attire for travelers.) But Jesus isn’t talking about rebellion because he now alludes to “Suffering Servant” passages (see Isaiah 53:12), and he tells the disciples that the two swords they have are “enough.” **These verses are difficult ones to understand, but what do you think Jesus means by them?**

The story now moves to the Mount of Olives. Scholars have long noted a chiasmic construction in this passage (see the second question on p. 34 of this study). Discounting vv. 43-33, which are missing in the oldest copies of Luke, may help you see this chiasm more easily. The structure outlines as follows (from Culpepper, p. 432):

A. *He said, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial"*

B. *Then he withdrew from them*

C. *knelt down, and prayed*

D. *"Father, if you are willing..."*

C' *When he got up from prayer*

B' *he came to the disciples and found them sleeping*

A' *he said, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the..."*

In chiasmic structures, it is often interesting to notice elements that show up only in one set of pairs. For example, the mention of the disciples' sleep in B' and A' has no corresponding behavior in A and B. In this story, Jesus goes to pray and instructs his disciples to pray as well. Within this story are both warnings to disciples and a model for disciples. **What are they? Reflect on them.**

The arrest of Jesus is narrated more briefly than in Mark, and Luke adds the disciples' use of a sword (as do Matthew and John). However, in Luke there seems to be a connection to Jesus' earlier instructions on carrying sword. Despite Jesus' earlier command that they buy swords, his response when a disciple employs one here is "No more of this!" In Luke, these are Jesus' last words to his disciples. **Reflect on the meaning of these words.**

The remembering of Peter's denial surely serves some purpose other than simple history. **Why does the Church need to remember what Peter did?**

Even in our own country, where law enforcement and the military operate with great restraint compared to much of the world, we still know of soldiers torturing prisoners and police sodomizing those in custody. So it is little surprise that Jesus is mistreated by those who hold him. Jesus is the Suffering Servant who bears the worst of what humanity has to offer.

At daybreak, Jesus is taken before the Sanhedrin. He refuses their question of whether he is Messiah, but says that he is the Son of Man who will now be seated in power at God's right hand. The assembly infers from this that Jesus is, or at least claims to be, Son of God. This is the only case where human characters call Jesus Son of God. (It should be noted here that the NIV is simply wrong when it translates Jesus' words in 22:70. Jesus says, in words that are meant to

be ambivalent, “You say that I am.” The reader may infer that they are correct in saying this, but Jesus does not say so.) **How is it that the Sanhedrin can correctly deduce Jesus’ identity, but still violently reject him?**

The Sanhedrin brings Jesus to Pilate. The Sanhedrin’s questions to Jesus had been religious in nature, but the charges before Pilate are all political and all relate to sedition. The most serious charge is that Jesus is presenting himself as a king. Pilate asks Jesus if he is a king, and Jesus responds as ambivalently as he did to the Sanhedrin. “You say so.” (The NIV makes the same translation error as in 22:70.) Pilate then declares Jesus innocent. The Sanhedrin says he “stirs up the people.” These are the same “people” whom the Jewish leaders “feared” in 22:2. Pilate learns of Jesus’ Galilean roots, and farms the case out to Herod, who has jurisdiction in Galilee and who is in town for Passover. Only Luke tells of Jesus being taken before Herod.

Herod, who has long been curious about Jesus, is thrilled to meet him, hoping that he will do some spectacular, miraculous display for him. But Jesus does not respond to him. Rebuffed and offended, Herod has his soldiers mock and mistreat Jesus. But apparently he renders no verdict against Jesus, returning him to Pilate. Luke adds a peripheral historical note here. Pilate and Herod, formerly enemies, became friends this day. Perhaps this is simply a stray historical note, but perhaps it is more. **What significance might be drawn from the fact that Pilate and Herod are *reconciled* to one another?**

The trial now returns to Pilate who has already declared Jesus innocent and will do so again. There is a rather obvious attempt in the gospels to insulate the Roman authorities in Jesus death and implicate the Jewish leaders. Insisting that following Jesus was not contrary to Roman law was likely a big issue for the fledgling Church living in a Roman world. But absent the Romans and with the Jews reduced to tiny minority, these verses have often been used to “blame the Jews” for Jesus’ death. At times the Church has even justified persecution and killing of Jews because of this “guilt.” Surely Jesus’ final words to sword wielding disciples should let us know what he thinks of such things. “No more of this!”

Pilate and Jesus provide interesting contrast. Jesus knows what he must do and is steadfast in his devotion to the task, steeled by prayer and faith. Pilate also knows what he should do, but repeatedly attempts to shirk his duty, hoping others will make things easy for him. Three times Pilate will declare Jesus innocent, but nonetheless sends him to die. Pilate’s last gambit for getting off the hook is to involve the people, the ones the leaders fear, the ones who Jesus has been accused of perverting. Yet now the people turn against Jesus, raising the question of just who has perverted them.

From the gospel’s perspective, while Jesus is literally on trial, it is everyone else who is tried, the people, Pilate, disciples, leaders, etc. Culpepper (p. 450) suggests that this trial exposes “the forces, commitments, and loyalties that we hold most dear. When the chips are down, can Jesus count on us...?” **What warnings and insights might we draw for ourselves from the events of Jesus’ trial?**

Session XII Death and Resurrection

Readings for this session: **Luke 23:26-24:53**

Exploring the readings

The crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus are narrated in five scenes. Some material is from Mark, but much is uniquely Lukan and is organized to make important interpretive points. These five scenes are 1) journey to the crucifixion, including Jesus' warning to some women, 2) description of the crucifixion and Jesus being mocked; 3) conversation with those crucified next to Jesus; 4) darkness over the land and Jesus' death; 5) Jesus' burial by Joseph. As Jesus is led away to his death, a passerby is compelled to carry his cross. Normally a condemned man would carry his own cross. Many assume Jesus too weakened from flogging, yet Luke reports no floggings. Interestingly, the otherwise unknown Simon of Cyrene embodies Jesus' call to be a disciple, taking up the cross and following Jesus. Only Luke tells of Jesus followed by a crowd including "woman who were beating their breasts and wailing for him." This activity is a typical expression of mourning and lament. Jesus responds to their lament by recalling his own lament over Jerusalem. Jesus concludes his warning to the women with a line about green and dry wood. In typical rabbinic form, the hearer is encouraged to reason from the lesser (the green) to the greater (the dry). **What do you think Jesus means by this statement, and what does Luke want the reader to learn from Jesus' words to the women?**

Luke's description of the crucifixion, like all the gospels, is brief, without much detail. Little is known about the actual practice of crucifixion, but we do know that it was common and was quite varied in its forms. Luke says only that Jesus was crucified between two criminals, and his clothing was divided by lots. Whether Jesus was crucified naked or was allowed a loin cloth out of respect for Jewish sensibilities is not known. In stark contrast to the morbid attention to Jesus' suffering in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," Luke seems interested only in Christological themes. He connects Jesus' death to Old Testament prophecy and points to Jesus' identity. Casting lots for Jesus' clothes comes from Psalm 22:18, and the offer of sour wine comes from Psalm 69:21. The taunts of the leaders, soldiers, and one criminal highlight Jesus' identity as Messiah and king, and point to his mission of salvation. (Notice that "the people" do not participate in the mocking. They merely "stood by, watching.") **How do the taunts directed at Jesus and his refusal to "save himself" help confirm who Jesus is?**

Within this section are the famous words, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Your Bible will likely note that this verse is not present in some ancient manuscripts of Luke. Scholars are mixed on whether this was originally in Luke. On the one

hand, it is in keeping with Luke's picture of Jesus and it fits perfectly with the book of Acts, where Peter speaks of the people and their leaders acting out of ignorance (3:17). On the other hand, it seems odd that such a pivotal verse would have fallen out of some ancient manuscripts. On balance, however, it is probably best to consider the words authentic. **How do these words help us further understand Jesus' identity?**

When one criminal joins the taunting, he seems to culminate an escalating campaign of mockery. The leaders "scoffed" (literally, thumbed their noses at), the soldiers "mocked," and the criminal "derides" (in Greek "blasphemed," *blasfhme/w*). The second criminal "rebukes" the first. Rebuking is normally reserved for Jesus in Luke, but he has instructed his followers, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him (17:3, translation by Culpepper, p. 458), and the second criminal seems to follow this advice. While others mock Jesus, one criminal speaks the obvious truth. Jesus is innocent. He then makes a request. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Exactly what "into your kingdom" means is the subject of debate. It could be a request for Jesus to remember the man on the day the kingdom arrives, i.e. at the time of Jesus' return. More likely it speaks of the time when Jesus' suffering is ended and he enters into his kingdom, i.e. at his ascension to God.

Jesus' grants the man much more than is asked. Two stock Lukan forms are in Jesus' words. This is the sixth "truly I tell you" statements in Luke (literally "Amen, I say to you"). It is also the last of the "today" statements as in the story of Zacchaeus where Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:9). Jesus' words on "paradise" conjure up images of heaven for some. Yet, "paradise" is not a synonym for heaven in Jewish thought, though it could mean a place of special blessing. Culpepper (p. 459) suggests, "As with so many other scenes from Luke, this one is a Gospel in miniature." **How might this scene be viewed that way? What is the gospel that it declares?**

Two signs accompany Jesus' death. There is darkness "over the whole land" and "the curtain of the temple was torn in two." **What might these signs mean?** (*It may be helpful to recall the way Luke treats the cleansing of the temple as you answer this question.*)

Unlike in Mark, Jesus does not die with a cry of abandonment. He quotes a different Psalm, 31:5, as he commends his spirit to God. In Luke, Jesus dies with his faith in God intact, and he dies with a certain sense of peace. Luke then reports three responses to Jesus' death from a centurion, then the crowd, and finally Jesus' acquaintances. The centurion's response functions

quite differently than it does in Mark. In Luke the centurion “praised God” and then pronounces Jesus “innocent” or perhaps just or “righteous.” **What significance do you see in the centurion’s reaction to Jesus’ death?**

The second response is from “all the crowds.” They do not speak but they return home “beating their breasts.” This recalls not only the women in 23:27 but the tax collector who begs for mercy in 18:13. **What is the significance of the crowds’ reaction to Jesus’ death?**

The final response is from Jesus’ acquaintances, and the most muted of the three. They simply stood at a distance, watching. **Why do you think that Luke reports their observing the events from a distance?**

After his death, the one who entered Jerusalem on a never ridden donkey is buried in a never used tomb by Joseph, a member of the council that handed Jesus over to Pilate. Things are accomplished quickly because the Sabbath, which begins at sundown, is drawing near. The women who have been with Jesus and provided for him see where he is laid. Apparently seeing that Jesus has not been anointed for burial, they go to prepare spices and ointments. They will have this one last chance to care for Jesus. Meanwhile they rest on the Sabbath.

Luke’s report of Easter morning seems a continuation of Friday. The women had seen the tomb, gone to prepare spices and ointments, and now return. Luke’s account shares elements from the Mark and John’s gospels. The discovery of the empty tomb is similar to Mark, but while Mark and Matthew speak of the Jesus appearing in Galilee, Luke has Jesus appear in Jerusalem, as does John. In Luke, Galilee lies in the past, and the angels tell the women to remember what Jesus has told them there, how he would be crucified and rise on the third day. Luke refutes charges that the empty tomb is a hoax or a misunderstanding. To the charge that Jesus didn’t really die, Luke has the women observe his burial. To the suggestion that they went to the wrong tomb on Sunday morning, Luke tells us that they saw which tomb it was on Friday. And the report of the women is verified by Peter, who goes and finds things as the women said.

In Luke, the angels explain the significance of the empty tomb to the women, who misunderstand what is happening. (The men do no better when they hear of it.) They ask, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” **In what ways do we continue to look for Jesus in the wrong places?**

The women's report of the empty tomb seems "an idle tale" to the apostles. Even when Peter confirms that the tomb is empty, he is simply "amazed." Luke goes to some length to insist on the historical accuracy of the empty tomb, but it doesn't make believers of the women or disciples. **If knowing the tomb was empty won't do it, what is necessary for faith?**

Jesus himself now appears to disciples on the way to Emmaus. The location of Emmaus is unknown, and the events are somewhat improbable. How could people walk to another town, have a meal, then return to Jerusalem and take part in another meal where Jesus again appears? Indeed, Luke reports all of chapter 24 as occurring on the same day. It may simply be that Luke wants all these events associated directly with the resurrection and so places them all on Easter. The Emmaus road story appears only in Luke. It seems to address issues similar to those found in John's story of "doubting Thomas." How is it that those who were not eye witnesses to the resurrection can have faith? **What are some answers that seem to be provided by this story?**

Jesus disappears as soon as these disciples recognize him. Does this say anything about the nature of religious experience? What?

Cleopas and his companion hurry back to Jerusalem where they learn that others have seen Jesus as well. While they are speaking, Jesus appears again. This final episode of Luke contains three elements, proof that Jesus is raised, a commission to Jesus' followers, and a blessing as he leaves. **In what way might these events serve as a paradigm for our own discipleship?**

The ending of Luke sets the stage for Acts. The disciples return to Jerusalem and joyfully await the promised "power from on high." They spend their time "in the temple blessing God." **Why might Luke choose to end his story "in the temple?"**