

Don't Miss Out on the Celebrating

Scripture: Matthew 11:16-30

September 14, 2014

Midweek Provocative Questions

- When do you long for a Savior who is bringing judgment?
- When do you long for a Savior who brings unconditional grace and love?

SERMON POINTS/OUTLINE

- Jesus was strongly criticized for what some saw as flaunting the Sabbath or ignoring people's needs by enjoying an occasional feast or family meal; he was also criticized for eating with those considered unclean (*e.g.*, tax collectors, sinners, lepers, women and others)
- John the Baptist's message was that the Messiah would bring **judgment**, more or less so that the Kingdom of God could come. Jesus' message was more focused on the Kingdom of God being present (that Jesus brought the Kingdom in a new way) and preached freedom and grace, *especially for those who were held captive by people who "lorded" it over others.*
- Jesus, **the Lord of Heaven and Earth**, proclaimed that those who came to him would find relief from oppressive systems – both religious and political.

A Guide for Daily Reading and Meditation

A Prayer for Every Day: God of wonder and joy, I lift my heart and my life to you today, praising and thanking you for your countless blessings, grace and mercy that you pour into my life. Fix my eyes and heart on your Word for us today and renew my covenant to follow you and be more like Jesus every day. Amen.

SUNDAY – Review the midweek questions in light of today's worship

In light of today's sermon, ask yourself:

- When do you long for a Savior who is bringing judgment?
- When do you long for a Savior who brings unconditional grace and love?



MONDAY

Read Matthew 11:1-15¹ (*The Message*)

¹ When Jesus finished placing this charge before his twelve disciples [*this is referring to the passage just before which says "whoever gives a cup of cold water in my name is my disciple*], he went on to teach and preach in their villages. ² John, meanwhile, had been locked up in prison. When he got wind of what Jesus was doing, he sent his own disciples ³ to ask, "Are you the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?" ⁴ Jesus told them, "Go back and tell John what's going on: ⁵ The blind see, The lame walk, Lepers are cleansed, The deaf hear, The dead are raised, The wretched

¹ Scriptures found in this document marked *The Message*: originally published by NavPress in English as *THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language* copyright 2002 by Eugene Peterson. All rights reserved. ([The Message Bible Online](http://www.themessage.com))

of the earth learn that God is on their side. ⁶ "Is this what you were expecting? Then count yourselves most blessed!" ⁷ When John's disciples left to report, Jesus started talking to the crowd about John. "What did you expect when you went out to see him in the wild? A weekend camper? ⁸ Hardly. What then? A sheik in silk pajamas? Not in the wilderness, not by a long shot. ⁹ What then? A prophet? That's right, a prophet! Probably the best prophet you'll ever hear. ¹⁰ He is the prophet that Malachi announced when he wrote, 'I'm sending my prophet ahead of you, to make the road smooth for you.' ¹¹ "Let me tell you what's going on here: No one in history surpasses John the Baptizer; but in the kingdom he prepared you for, the lowliest person is ahead of him. ¹² For a long time now people have tried to force themselves into God's kingdom. ¹³ But if you read the books of the Prophets and God's Law closely, you will see them culminate in John, teaming up with him in preparing the way for the Messiah of the kingdom. ¹⁴ Looked at in this way, John is the 'Elijah' you've all been expecting to arrive and introduce the Messiah. ¹⁵ "Are you listening to me? Really listening?

John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, had preached a message of repentance and the Judgment to come when the Messiah came. This passage is about John's being jailed and wondering about Jesus' ministry which clearly was not living up to John's expectations! One of the commentators I read on this week's passage said this:

John...is now having doubts...The great judgment has not materialized, the corrupt are still in power, and John is languishing in Herod's prison.²

Jesus affirms John's ministry but then proclaims in this passage (verse 11, in particular) that God's Kingdom and those who "get it" are even greater than John **because** ...Now the kingdom is breaking in through Jesus, and even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. (Elizabeth Johnson)

Jesus' Way: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are clean, the deaf hear, dead are raised, the poor hear good news (Mt. 11:5).



TUESDAY

Read Matthew 11:16-19 (*The Message*)

¹⁶ "How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, ¹⁷ 'We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.' ¹⁸ John came fasting and they called him crazy. ¹⁹ I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riff-raff. Opinion polls don't count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

I've never found this to be a particularly easy scripture to get into, and this portion of it never made much sense to me. To a person, every commentator that I read in preparation for this week said that this passage, which precedes Jesus' blasting of unrepentant Galilean towns that have had firsthand experience with Jesus and his message (vss. 20-24), exposes the way people, especially those in

² Elizabeth Johnson, Professor, Lutheran Institute of Theology, Meiganga, Cameroon.
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=970

power, find every reason in the book to avoid and ignore God's teachings. John the Baptist had been labeled crazy and demon-possessed because of his ascetic living and strong message, and Jesus is labeled as immoral and unclean because he eats with sinners and enjoys a party every now and then.

Back when I was directing the music and Christian ed ministries at Asbury UMC in Arnold, I remember a day when the pastor was just beside himself. There was a man in the congregation who would get exasperated with the pastor because he refused to preach a sermon about judgment. He wanted a good ol' hellfire and brimstone sermon every now and then to shake everybody out of their apathy – and perhaps to keep them from a fiery eternity.

The pastor said to me something like, "Why can't he understand that God is more about grace than about judgment? There is just no way I'm ever going to preach a sermon like that. I preach grace."

Bill Loader wrote: John's austerity of not eating and drinking belongs to the period of waiting; the promise has yet to arrive. Jesus' celebratory lifestyle of eating and drinking belongs to the period of fulfillment.³

Remember those stories about the bridegroom? How does this story speak to you? Where do you find yourself in terms of judgment and grace – both as proclaimer and recipient of grace? When do you wish it was all cut-and-dried?



WEDNESDAY

Read Matthew 11:28-30 (NRSV)⁴

²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

William Loader (see footnote from Tuesday's reading) commented on this portion of our passage: The invitation of Jesus in 11:28-30 is beautiful... The promise is not joy one day after strictures now, but joy now, embedded in the life of God and located in the midst of the world in its joy and pain - also in its hostility. With such a sense of rest we can turn our attention to what really matters, people, and turn aside from the busy hassles of religiosity with its industry of piety which continues to make of many churches its factories.

This is just so *right!* As I've said over and over in sermons, God in Christ wants the very best for us. Jesus doesn't want us struggling but to be our best selves, living our best lives – not always an easy thing since humans want that, too, but often try to go it alone. Being yoked to Christ also means getting to know him and his deep desires for us *and his ways*. What does that mean to you today?



³ Revd Emeritus Professor William R. G. Loader BA (Auckl) BD (Otago) Dr theol (Mainz, Germany) FAHA; Emeritus Professor at Murdoch University and Extraordinary Professor, North-West University, South Africa.
<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtPentecost4.html>

⁴ Scriptures marked NRSV from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. (New Revised Standard Bible Version Online)

THURSDAY

Isaac Watts wrote the hymn *Jesus Shall Reign* in 1719, and verse 4 goes like this:

Blessings abound where'er he reigns: the prisoners leap to lose their chains,
the weary find eternal rest, and all who suffer want are blest.

The 8:30 service often sings a contemporary Vineyard Church composition called *Reign in Me*, and the chorus goes like this:

Lord reign in me, reign in your power
Over all my dreams, in my darkest hour
You are the Lord of all I am, so won't you reign in me again.

Compare those 2 song "bits." Watts is proclaiming that blessings abound *where Jesus reigns*, and Vineyard is praying for Jesus to reign in the singer. What does that say to you today for your own life and discipleship?



FRIDAY



Re-read Matthew 11:25-30 and then meditate on this image by Cerezo Barredo. Note in your journal or just make notes on what the image means to you and how it speaks to you about this scripture passage.

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Rev. Vivian C. McCarthy
Reisterstown United Methodist Church
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