

Reaching Out - Empathy

John 21:1-21

OPENING PRAYER:

It is good to be together in the presence of the Lord! God, we welcome you to this place. We know that, apart from you, all that we try to do, say or study will sound like noise. Instead, we ask that you guide us in our words, guide us in our prayers and guide us in our study -- that all that is said and done will bring you the great glory you deserve. May it be a sweet sound to you. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree or disagree with in the sermon this week?
- Where did you see God this week?
- How have you seen people show support during this past year?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read John 21:1-21.

- What jumps out at you in this scripture?
- Identify speed bumps in this passage – details that show you down, demand your attention, evoke strong feelings – such as specific words, actions, characters, etc.
- What questions come to your mind as you read?
- How do you see Jesus expressing love and empathy to Peter?
- How does loving Christ propel us toward empathy?
- What would have been your response if you were betrayed by Peter three times?
- Who might be difficult for you to express empathy toward in your sphere of influence?

NEXT STEPS:

- How can you embody empathy in your closest relationships?
- What is one or two acts of empathy you can express this week?

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

I am not worthy, Master and Lord, that you should come beneath the roof of my soul; yet, since you in your love toward all wish to dwell in me, in boldness I come. You command, "Open the gates" -- which you alone have forged; and you will come in with love toward all as is your nature; you will come in and enlighten my darkened reason. I believe that you will do this: for you did not send away the harlot that came to you with tears; nor cast out the repentant publican; nor reject the thief who acknowledged your kingdom; nor forsake the repentant persecutor, a yet greater act; but all of those who came to you in repentance were counted in the band of your friends, who alone abide blessed forever, now, and unto the endless ages. -St. John Chrysostom, (c.347--407)

Your Story Matters – Vulnerability

Luke 24:13-24

OPENING PRAYER:

Spirit of Wisdom and Light, shine in the deepest recesses of our minds and hearts. Allow no hiddenness to remain in us. Instead, flood us with the truth of your Word, which has the power to change and renew us. For truth is found in the Word Incarnate, and the truth will set us free. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree or disagree with in the sermon this week?
- Where did you see God this week?
- What do you do when you are feeling down? Go off by yourself, throw a party, retail therapy, etc?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Luke 24:13-24.

- What jumps out at you in this scripture?
- As you listen/read the two disciples talking (v. 19-24), what tones of voice do you hear? What plans do you imagine them making? How do they react to the stranger?
- V. 27 says 'the stranger' discussed Moses and all the Prophets. What passages do you think 'the stranger' would have used? How would you explain each of those? Why do you believe Jesus used this sort of bible study instead of just revealing himself immediately?
- What's your Road to Emmaus story? Where has Jesus surprised you? Where has Jesus shown up in your life? Describe your experience.
- What does the resurrected Jesus need to change in your life?
- What is different in your life because you follow the resurrected Jesus?

NEXT STEPS:

- Write down, rehearse or explain the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is helpful to practice this experience to be prepared when God makes an opportunity.
- The same holds with our own experience with Jesus. When people ask us why we believe, it is always good to have our own story ready to impact the lives of others.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

O God, your Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread. Open the eyes of our faith, that we may see him in his redeeming work; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. -Book of Common Worship, 1993

Unfinished Business – Honesty

John 20:24-30

OPENING PRAYER:

Great God and Lord of life, sometimes it is hard to believe. We find ourselves like Thomas, needing to see clearly and fully. Sometimes it is hard to believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ really happened. Forgive our doubt and slowness of heart. Help us to believe! Help us to believe anew and in the great power of Easter life! Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree or disagree with in the sermon this week?
- Where did you see God this week?
- Science now shows there are many types of different ways people learn: touch, listening, interaction, dialogue. How do you learn? If you encountered Jesus, how would you want to know?
- What is your stance on doubting or questioning God?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read John 20:24-30.

- What jumps out at you in this scripture?
- How do you interpret Jesus response to Thomas? (angry, tender, loving, frustrated, terse, etc)
- What helps you in dealing with doubts?
- What doubts or questions do you have right now? How can your friends/group help you?

NEXT STEPS:

- Where could you use Jesus' peace right now? (relationship, fear, work, etc?) Write them down or say them out loud in prayer.
- What's that inner doubt you are extremely reluctant to express. Pray about the right mentor to reach out and faithfully struggle with your doubts like Thomas.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

O God,
since you have raised the fallen world
by the humiliation of your Son:
Grant continual gladness to your faithful people,
that those whom you have delivered
from the dangers of everlasting death
may receive from you eternal joy;
through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen. (Traditional Prayer of the Day)

Leaning In – Humility

Philippians 2:1-11; Ephesians 4:1-4

OPENING PRAYER:

Reconciling Savior,

In a world where many feel friendless, thank you for your constant companionship. In situations of violence and hatred, thank you for your commandment to love one another. In times where many know death and destruction, thank you for this season of resurrection. As you love us, make us faithful friends who love one another by proclaiming the good news of the resurrection to all. We ask this in your name. Amen.

BREAKING THE ICE:

- What did you agree or disagree with in the sermon this week?
- Where did you see God this week?
- Share your most funny/embarrassing moment.

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

- What jumps out at you in this scripture?
- From this passage, what can you identify is wrong with the church in Philippi?
- How does Christian humility differ from being a doormat?
- What do you think it was like for Jesus to leave heaven and come to earth? Put on humility? How could you apply that to your life?
- How does this passage challenge the world's definition of success?

Read Ephesians 4:1-4

- Which quality in verse 2 do you identify with most? Least? How can you grow this week?
- According to this passage, what does it mean to live in unity with the church? Why do you believe God gives us this example? In what ways do you need others?
- How can you live in to the calling you have received this week? What actions will you take?

NEXT STEPS:

- What is one specific way you can imitate Christ's humility this week?
- Who in your life has put other's needs above themselves? How could you honor them this week? Write a card? Call? Etc?
- What step will you take to live in humility?

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:

Lord our God, great, eternal, wonderful in glory, who keeps covenant and promises for those who love you with their whole hearts, who are the life of all, the help of those that flee to you, the hope of those who cry to you, cleanse us from our sins, secret and open, and from every thought displeasing to your goodness - cleanse our bodies and souls, our hearts and consciences, that with a pure heart and a clear soul, with perfect love and calm hope, we may venture confidently and fearlessly to pray to you. Amen.

--Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil