

August 20th Readings

[NUMBERS 33:40-35:34](#)

[LUKE 5:12-28](#)

[PSALM 65:1-13](#)

[PROVERBS 11:23](#)

What was your first response when you knew that Jesus was asking for you to follow him? As we read through the Bible we find several examples of Jesus calling on individuals to follow him. Some examples are full of emotion like when Jesus called on Peter who fell to his knees in the beginning of Luke 5. Some examples are after Jesus heals an illness due to faith like that of the paralytic who was lowered through the roof in the same chapter. But what about when Jesus called Levi? No record of any miraculous signs or acts of kindness given towards Levi. There is not a previous engagement between Levi and Jesus. We are simply told that Jesus walked up to him and said "Follow me". What does it fully mean to "follow"? Jesus was not saying follow me through the city or for the next week. He was asking for a commitment. A lifestyle commitment. So what did Levi do? "And leaving everything, he rose and followed him." Luke 5:28

Why did Levi go? With only those words spoken what could have prompted him to immediately get up and leave everything behind? No questions were asked by Levi as to where, why or when. He apparently stood up to follow while leaving behind money that he had been collecting. He was a tax collector, despised among the Jews, thought of as a traitor, and was sure to have more wealth than others. Was he wanting a friend? Was he feeling prideful that he was chosen from the crowd? Or was it more like his heart was ready to be molded by Jesus? That Jesus saw his value when others couldn't? When Jesus looked at him, really looked at him, while speaking those words I would think that Levi could see the depth of his love. Levi left a job that he probably could not go back to like a fisherman if he later changed his mind. Furthermore, he was going to be walking alongside those that he had offended with high taxes. This was a major split-second decision and he did it readily. How easy it is for us to read the story and think "Yes, of course you would follow", but is that what we do in our everyday actions? Are we true followers of Jesus?

Matthew 16:24 "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

August 21st Readings

[NUMBERS 36:1-13](#)

[DEUTERONOMY 1:1-46](#)

[LUKE 5:29-6:11](#)

[PSALM 66:1-20](#)

[PROVERBS 11:24-26](#)

Once again, we read of a story where a command is given by Jesus and it is immediately obeyed. In Luke 6:6-11, Jesus tells of a man with a withered hand to “stretch out his hand”. How can he physically do that? The man chose not to argue with Jesus or to politely say “Sir, I would if I could”. Instead he does as he is told and his hand is restored. He followed Jesus’ command with faith and he was healed. Which leads me back to thinking how it must have been to be within Jesus’ presence. Could you see in his eyes his unending love? What beautiful compassion that must have been evident to those with him. How wonderful to stand in front of him with his full attention on you, giving you a command of action and of faith. This same commanding and loving attitude is what made the Pharisees angry. Everyone was wanting to be with Jesus, follow Jesus, observe him and his miracles. Not only were the people mesmerized by Jesus but the Pharisees lost some of their “credit” when asked “is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?”

Jesus was trying to teach them and those around that being kind to others transcends any laws. The Pharisees did not SEE who Jesus was. They were not moved by his caring attitude. The Pharisees were blinded by looking inwardly at themselves rather than outwardly to who was standing in front of them. How often do we take for granted who Jesus is, the abuse and scorn that he endured? Are we blinded by our own goals, our own thoughts of how life should be, or worrying about how others are viewing us?

“Shout for joy to God, all the earth;

²sing the glory of his name;

give to him glorious praise!

³Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!

So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.

⁴All the earth worships you

and sings praises to you;

they sing praises to your name.” Psalm 66:1-4

August 22nd Readings

[DEUTERONOMY 2:1-3:29](#)

[LUKE 6:12-38](#)

[PSALM 67:1-7](#)

[PROVERBS 11:27](#)

Why are the commands that Jesus gives us in Luke 6:27-38 so hard to obey at times? We are told to love our enemies, bless those that curse us, pray for those who abuse us. That is really difficult! When our daughter was in elementary school she was at odds often with another girl in her class. Daily we would hear stories of how awful this girl treated her. One night after she was tucked in bed she decided to discuss again about all the misconducts that had occurred. When I told her how Jesus instructed us on exactly how to deal with these situations by praying for those who abuse us, she became very upset. She crossed her arms and said emphatically “No”. Again I explained that yes, we are to lift up their names in prayer, present our situation to God. She looked at me and said, “No, she is not worth my prayers.” Don’t we all feel that way at one time or another? I know that I do. However, God has commanded us to do exactly that. Why? I believe that there are several transformations that occur when we pray for someone by name. One, we are humbling ourselves to God. Recognizing that he has all power and we do not while we lay our burdens down at his feet. Two, when we utter a person’s name in prayer we examine them through God’s eyes. This is someone whom God created and loves just as much as He loves me. Three, we will better understand that we cannot control what other people do or say, but rather that God is always in control. We have faith in the peace that passes understanding. What a blessing to have these instructions for such moments when we are blinded by our emotions. What a blessing to know these commands are not given to make life difficult but rather to help us grow stronger in him.

August 23rd Readings

[DEUTERONOMY 4:1-49](#)

[LUKE 6:39-7:10](#)

[PSALM 68:1-18](#)

[PROVERBS 11:28](#)

Peanuts comic strip is a classic. Who doesn't love Snoopy and all the different characters portrayed? There was one with Charlie Brown and Lucy contemplating life at the wall. Lucy says "Tell me something. Are there more bad people in the world, or are there more good people?" To which Charlie Brown answers, "Who is to say? Who is to say who is bad and who is good?" Lucy excitedly replies, "I will!!!"

Jesus addresses this in Luke 6:41-42. "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" Why is it so easy for us to notice the flaws in others while ignoring that same flaw in ourselves? Maybe part of the reason is that if we can pick someone else apart then we think that our own halo shines a bit brighter? Or if we are spending our time worrying about the sin of others we won't have to worry about our own sin. That is what we do. Like a self-defense mechanism.

How come we let what other people think of us decide our self-image? Where we stand with God should be our main concern. Before we ever feel the need to confront someone about a possible grievance maybe we should spend time on our knees praying and confessing our own sins. In Luke 6:38, right before warning us about the plank in our own eye, Jesus says, "For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." I certainly wouldn't want to be judged as harshly as I judge others at times. Would you?

August 24th Readings

[DEUTERONOMY 5:1-6:25](#)

[LUKE 7:11-35](#)

[PSALM 68:19-35](#)

[PROVERBS 11:29-31](#)

Hagar the Horrible is a popular comic strip like Peanuts. There was one strip where Hagar is kneeling in prayer. "It's not easy to believe in you God. We never see you. How come you never show yourself? How do we know you even exist..." Then you see the following examples going on all around: a flower blooming, a volcano erupting, an eclipse of sun turning the sky black, a shooting star, a tidal wave rushing over Hagar, lightning flashing, a bush beginning to burn, and a stone rolling away from the entrance to a tomb.

Hagar stands up and says, "OK, OK. I give up! Every time I bring up this subject, all we get is interruptions."

Doubt. How can we as Christians see glimpses of God daily and yet doubt His existence? I know that God has richly blessed me in ways that could have only come from Him but yet when the next crisis happens I become scared and unsure. I would guess that this is a struggle for everyone at some point in time. We can read of an example of this in Luke 7:18-23 where John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus asking if Jesus was the true Messiah. Honestly I do not know if he was doing this for his own disciples to hear and know from Jesus' words, or if he knew that Jesus was the Messiah and was hoping for more action in the political sense, or if he had overall doubts. The story still shows that even those who fully know the scriptures can have doubts. No one is exempt from disbelief. The devil delights in creating questions and cracks in our faith. Whatever the reason for the question asked, I would guess that John and his disciples were comforted by the words of Jesus. "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (Luke 7:22-23) With all of Jesus' good works for God's glory we should not be offended. We should not be distracted or upset with how and when God's plan will come into fruition. His timing is not our timing therefore we are to have complete faith in Him without drawing our own conclusions. I am grateful for John for many reasons. He was a great prophet for the Lord with immense passion. He was a prophet who was able to say, "He is here!" He is the man who helps to show that it is ok to have questions and doubts as long as we come before the Lord with a humble heart.

August 25th Readings

[DEUTERONOMY 7:1-8:20](#)

[LUKE 7:36-8:3](#)

[PSALM 69:1-18](#)

[PROVERBS 12:1](#)

Luke 7:48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

What beautiful words! Jesus let the sinful woman know that her sins were forgiven in front of many others, including Pharisees. She was a notorious sinner in the city as stated in Luke 7:37. There was probably an awkward silence when she was crying, kissing Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. No one knew what to say out loud but Jesus could read the thoughts about the situation. This woman had immense gratitude for she already knew that her sins were forgiven. She could not contain herself and wanted to be sure to show Jesus how much she loved him. She was accepting of the words "Your sins are forgiven." How often do we know this but still have to convince ourselves repeatedly? Knowing that our sins are forgiven and being accepting of this mercy can be different. God has the ability to forgive our sins while forgetting them as well. We tend to forgive but have a much harder time forgetting. I am thankful for God's mercy and will strive harder to extend that mercy to myself and others.

August 26th Readings

[DEUTERONOMY 9:1-10:22](#)

[LUKE 8:4-21](#)

[PSALM 69:19-36](#)

[PROVERBS 12:2-3](#)

"Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." ²¹But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'" Luke 8:19-21

Wow! To think that Jesus did not stop to see his family that was wanting to be with him. Why did Jesus choose not to go see them but rather to stay speaking with the crowd? My opinion is that Jesus was making the point to all who could hear that "family" should be your Christian family. Oh the blessings and beauty of the church family. These are the people that share what should be your first love – God. Those that will encourage you with Christian principles. The family that sees you as another sinner who is striving to be better for the Lord. How wonderful this family is! How blessed we are to openly worship together in His name. Did Jesus ever say that he didn't love his mother or brothers? Absolutely not! Only that his first

priority at that time was to speak to those who wanted to hear. To love those who needed that blessing. What a wonderful Savior that we have!

Thank you dear Lord for the church family!