

St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church
Formation in Faith Lectionary
2018

March 4

Who is the Greatest?

Mark 9:30-37; Luke 22:24-27

Two different stories from two different gospels depict the disciples as quarreling among themselves. In the midst of Jesus' predictions about his own suffering and death, they are arguing about which one of them is the greatest. Jesus' response reveals not only the path that he himself will walk, but a new way of being for any who would follow after him. True greatness will come in a different way than any of them expect.

Questions for Discussion:

In Mark 9, the disciples fall into this argument just after Jesus speaks about his coming death and resurrection. Do you think this is a coincidence? In what ways may his prediction have caused their quarrel?

The disciples are initially silent when Jesus asks them about their quarrel. Why do you think they are embarrassed about their conversation?

Jesus tell them "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." What does it mean to be last, or the servant of all?

Jesus takes a little child in his arms and tells them "Whomever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." Who do you believe sent Jesus? Think about little children. What does Jesus mean by welcoming a child?

In Luke 22, Jesus responds to their quarrel by setting their argument against the rulers of this world, kings and those in authority. What does our world tell us about greatness? What does it mean to be great and powerful? How does this stand against what Jesus says about greatness?

Jesus will achieve glory by giving himself up to suffering and death, that we and all of creation might be restored. What would it mean for you to give of yourself? What does it mean for you to be one who serves?

March 11

Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1-45

Jesus receives news from Martha and Mary that their brother Lazarus is dying and that they hope that Jesus will come quickly to heal him. Yet Jesus delays, knowing that he will be able to raise Lazarus from the dead. By the time Jesus and the disciples arrive in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days and the sisters are in mourning. Moved by their grief and by their faith in the coming resurrection, Jesus steps forward to show that he is the resurrection and the life.

Questions for Discussion:

Though John tells us that Jesus loves Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he delays going until after Lazarus has died. By the time Jesus arrives Lazarus has been dead for four days, long enough for rigor mortis and decay to prove that he is dead, not just asleep or in a coma. Why do you think he delays?

Martha greets Jesus with great faith, faith that he would have been able to heal Lazarus, and faith that God hears Jesus' prayers. How do you greet Jesus in faith? What does it mean for you to trust in Jesus?

Martha misunderstands Jesus at first, thinking he means Lazarus will be raised at the end of time. What does Jesus mean when he says that he "is" the resurrection and the life? What does it mean to you?

Jesus is moved by the sisters' grief and begins to weep. If Jesus knows that he can raise Lazarus from the dead, why do you think he cries?

Jesus prays to God saying "Father, I thank you for having heard me." The Father has already heard Jesus even before he prayed. What does this say to us about how God hears our prayers?

John goes on to tell us that this miracle causes the Pharisees and Chief Priests to want to kill Jesus. This miracle of new life will lead directly to Jesus' own death on the cross. What link do you see between this story about Lazarus, and Jesus own death and resurrection? Why do you think the Jewish leaders felt so threatened by what had happened?

March 18

Zacchaeus and the Tree

Luke 19:1-10

At the culmination of Jesus' great journey toward Jerusalem, he passes through Jericho and is greeted by a large crowd. A tax collector named Zacchaeus is so eager to see Jesus, he runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree. As a tax collector, Zacchaeus is hated by the community. They see him as a swindler, a Roman collaborator, and a traitor to the Jewish people. Yet Jesus does not turn him away. He has come not to shun the wicked, but to bring salvation to all who turn to him.

Questions for Discussion:

Zacchaeus is the chief tax collector for Jericho, a prosperous trading city. Tax collectors were Roman collaborators, contracting with the occupying empire to collect taxes for them. Do you think the people of Jericho had reason to be angry with Zacchaeus? Are there any people in our life with whom we are angry? Who in our community are we suspicious of?

In spite of Zacchaeus' faults, he runs ahead and climbs a tree just to have a glimpse of Jesus. Have you ever gone to such lengths to see someone famous? Why do you think Zacchaeus was so eager to see Jesus?

Jesus immediately calls out to Zacchaeus, recognizing him, and saying that he will stay in his home. This was a tremendous honor to bestow upon someone whom the community hated. Why do you think Jesus does this? How do you think Zacchaeus felt by being recognized?

A tax collector could become rich by skimming off the top, or by cheating the people and collecting even more in taxes than the Romans asked. In promising to give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back those he had cheated, Zacchaeus is promising to make amends for what he had done wrong. Is there anyone in your life whom you have wronged? What could you do to make amends?

In spite everything that Zacchaeus has done in his life, Jesus accepts him and calls him a "son of Abraham," still covered under God's covenant of love. Jesus has come not just for the holy and pious, but for all people. What does it mean for you that Jesus has come for all people?

March 25

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

Matthew 21:1-10

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to great fanfare and celebration. Hailed by the people as the Son of David and heir to the throne of the Israel, Jesus nevertheless arrives humbly, riding not a great white horse but a humble donkey. The people may be rejoicing at the coming of the messiah, but he has come to fulfill the messianic promise in a way that no one in the crowd expects.

Questions for Discussion:

Jesus sends the disciples ahead to find an animal for him to ride into the city. As foretold, they find a donkey and a young colt tied together, fulfilling a prophecy in Zechariah. How do you think the disciple felt that all of this was taking place?

When we think of a hero riding forth in triumph, we usually picture a warrior on a white horse. It was not so different in Jesus' day. Conquerors rode mighty stallions, while a donkey was for humble farmers. What do you think it means that Jesus rode in to Jerusalem on a donkey?

A large crowd gathers, spreading palm branches and their own coats on the road for the donkey to walk upon, and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David." This is how the Jewish people would welcome a king. They had waited hundreds of years for the restoration of their king. How do you think it felt to welcome Jesus? What do you think they were expecting their new king to do? How would you feel if Jesus finally returned to us today? How do you welcome Jesus into your life each day?

The people of Jerusalem were waiting for a king who would be a great conqueror and drive out the oppressive Romans. What was Jesus actually coming to Jerusalem to do? How would his victory really be achieved?

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" This joyous phrase probably sounds familiar. Where do we say these words in our liturgy? What do you think it means that we welcome Jesus in the Eucharist just as the people welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday?