

GROW. PRAY. STUDY.

First United Methodist Church- Weekly Study Guide
“equipping people in becoming deeply committed Christians ”

The Final Week - Monday: Marriage and Taxes

Luke 19:47-48, 20: 20-40

Jesus spent the last week of his life in Jerusalem. He stayed on the Mount of Olives with his disciples at night and during the day he spent his time teaching in the Temple. This, of course, was a controversial move for Jesus.....especially considering what he had done on Sunday when he entered the temple and drove out the money-changers and those selling sacrificial doves. His presence in the temple teaching only further angered the Pharisees and Sadducees....the teachers of the Law. But Jesus wasn't going to hide from them or be moved by their threats. He had come to Jerusalem for a purpose....to proclaim that all people belong to Him....to proclaim he is the Messiah and King of Kings.

On Monday of the final week the teachers of the Law tried to trip Jesus up by talking to him about taxes and marriage. Their hope was they could trick him into claiming authority over Rome so they could turn him over to Pontius Pilate and have him killed. Jesus had no interest in claiming authority over Rome though. His was a different kind of King. He was interested in be King, Messiah, Lord over all of life....not just Rome. And so he offer his opinion on taxes and marriage....and in doing so he laid claim to all people. He made it clear to all who were willing to listen, “you belong to me.”

This week we are going to continue our study of the final week of Jesus' life. As you do your daily readings spend some time trying to answer the question, “Who do I belong to?” I especially encourage you to use the Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition this week as you try to answer this important question.

Monday READ Matthew 12:1-14

Jesus' enemies tried to trip him up well before the final week in Jerusalem, of course. For instance, they were always eager to catch him ignoring their strict rules about proper Sabbath rituals. Jesus, as always, cared more about people and their needs than about rules. Jesus doesn't just say the Pharisees' rules are mistaken. He claims his kingly authority— “the son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.” What would it mean for you to accept Jesus as Lord over those rules? Have you, like the religious leaders in this passage, ever looked to find fault with someone else out of fear or envy? What is it in us that sometimes makes us feel stronger when all we've done is pull someone else down?

Pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer

Tuesday READ John 8:48-59

John says this took place when Jesus was in the Temple courts (John 8:20). Jesus boldly claimed kingly power even over death, in spite of his enemies' scorn for his claim. Then he added, stunningly, "Before Abraham was, I am." "I Am" was no less than the Old Testament name of God! (Exodus 3:13, 14) "Who do you think you are?" the religious leaders asked Jesus. Who do you believe Jesus is? What difference does your answer make in how you live your life?

Pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer

Wednesday READ Matthew 19:3-12

In Jesus' day, rabbis had various views on divorce. One even said a man could divorce his wife for burning breakfast! Jesus disagreed, saying God's ideal is that marriages last. His foes then cited Moses' divorce laws (see Deuteronomy 24:1). Jesus refused to use the Bible in that simple black-and-white way. Jesus' disciples have a fascinating reaction to this exchange (verse 10). Jesus does not rebuke them, either, but stresses the gravity of a marriage vow. In these entrapment stories, Jesus' enemies are not searching for truth. For them, the subject is incidental—what matters is that it causes conflict. Have you ever known (or been) a person like that? How can you discern the difference between conflict for its own sake and a desire to learn and grow?

Pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer

Thursday READ Luke 20:20-40

You can almost hear Jesus' enemies saying, with malicious glee, "This will stump him." They asked about taxes—always a tough subject! Next they had a trick question meant to make belief in the resurrection seem absurd. Jesus calmly avoided the traps and turned the questions aside. Did paying taxes to Caesar mean betraying God? The question assumed it did; Jesus said no. The second question was not about marriage (verse 27). It was about whether belief in life beyond death makes sense. How do you understand Jesus' answer? Did he rule out loving relationships in the life to come? Or did he simply say it's foolish to assume earthly conditions in that life?

Pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer

Friday READ Matthew 21:23-39

What kind of king was Jesus? The religious leaders wanted to deny his authority. So Jesus asked them a question, one they found too tough to answer. His stories pointed to God as the final authority. He was God's son, sent to the vineyard. The leaders should have honored him, but were fighting God instead. 2000 years later, it's easy to look down on the religious leaders. Jesus told them that tax collectors and prostitutes (the people they most despised) were entering the Kingdom before them. But how do his words speak to you? How are you responding to, or resisting, Jesus' call on your life?

Pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer

Saturday.....READ Matthew 24:1-2

Today you will be reading the passage we will use in worship tomorrow. Pray that God will open your heart and prepare you for a powerful worship experience as we come together tomorrow as the body of Christ.

I invite you to pray the following prayer:

Dear God,

As I read this passage today help me do so with an open heart, sincerely listening for your voice in my life. Use this passage to prepare me for worship tomorrow. As I read it help me to set aside my own agenda and my own desires so that I may come to worship tomorrow prepared to be molded by you as I continue my journey to becoming a deeply committed disciple of yours. In Christ's name I pray, AMEN

Here at FUMC we believe part of becoming a Deeply Committed Christians is praying daily. If you find yourself struggling with what to say, we suggest you try praying Wesley's Covenant Prayer.

A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. AMEN