



*Kathy Roblyer*

When I was in college and studying Scripture weekly with a group in Palo Alto, California, we talked about the goal of making faith real by looking at everything in the world through the lens of our relationship with Christ, tossing aside trappings of our secular culture that would have us distort the Word of God. This seems now to be an obvious endeavor for the life of a Christian. Yet, so many times I lose sight of that when reading the news, participating on social media, or interacting with others. So for these devotionals, I tried to give thoughtful and prayerful consideration to Jesus' words and life as a foundation for our perspectives as we interact with the world each day.

*BIBLE READING: Luke 5:12-14*

One Quaker distinctive is recognizing that of God in everyone. Friends seek to exemplify a love that is humbling in its reverence for every person, knowing that each one is made in God's image. The love that recognizes God in everyone and therefore discriminates against no one surges ahead of institutionalized reforms, programs, and policies, paving the way for far more than mere tolerance or acceptance. It is a bold, unexpected, and transformative love that allows us to welcome others who are different from ourselves into our hearts, our neighborhoods, and our communities of faith.

The passage today was written at a time when lepers were separated from the rest of society to avoid infecting others. People were fearful that lepers would contaminate others and society would begin to unravel, so religious doctrine called for strict separation of those who were infected. Unlike his contemporaries, though, Jesus did not choose doctrine over people. When he met the ostracized leper, he was moved with compassion for him as an individual. He reached out to touch and heal, even though it was prohibited by the religious institutions of the day. Only after Jesus had healed the leper, did Jesus then instruct him to present himself to the leaders of the synagogue.

As you read or listen to the news, challenge yourself to identify those who are ostracized in our society. Be honest with yourself. How have you thought of and treated these folks who are different from yourself? What changes must you make to model Jesus' response more closely?

*SONG: If We Are the Body (Casting Crowns)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Ask God to bring to mind any whom you need to think of, or treat, with greater acceptance and love.*

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*BIBLE READING: Luke 5:17-20*

Fatu Kekula, a young nursing student in Liberia, didn't have much on hand with which to combat the Ebola virus that infected her family. When hospital beds were not available, she used simple methods and cobbled together meager supplies to deliver excellent nursing care with strict isolation precautions. As a result, three of her four infected family members survived, a 75 percent survival rate compared with 30 percent throughout the rest of the region. Without her help, it is estimated that two other members of her family would have died.

Hospitals, lacking supplies, had to turn away patients so caregivers incurred enormous risks, but Fatu embraced the urgent need and took swift action. Her commitment to meticulous protocol and creative treatment meant the difference between life and death for those she loved.

When people pressed around Jesus and one man had no hope of getting Jesus' attention, his friends opened the thatched roof and lowered him down in front of Jesus. They did something simple, yet courageous and creative, using what they had to improve their friend's chances of being healed. Jesus responded not with rebuke, but with understanding and praise. He saw the gift of faith and hope in their action and he honored that by healing their friend spiritually and physically. The friends' creativity, determination, and action paid off.

Waiting for abundant resources or perfect conditions before acting may cost too much. Sometimes the best outcomes occur when we risk in order to help another.

*SONG: Oceans*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for God to show you workarounds to actions of love and faith that are suffering from lack of resources.*

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*BIBLE READING: John 8:2-11*

When the men in this passage brought the woman caught in adultery before Jesus, they expected him to condemn the sin on an institutional religious basis. Instead, Jesus spoke to the woman and her accusers on a personal level. To the men about to stone her, Jesus communicated through his words, spoken and written in the sand, that each was guilty of his own particular sin. Jesus did not judge the woman, sentence her, publicize her sin, or trumpet his victory in saving her. He simply urged her to start over with different choices. She had already suffered by being caught in the act of adultery and would face more discrimination in the future. Further punishment would serve no purpose.

In 2014, several prominent church and societal leaders were exposed for sinful or illegal behaviors and tragically lost a lifetime of influence or credibility. Social media was abuzz with comments from Christians who had no firsthand knowledge of the situation, but were quick to convict. Others were quick to defend. Sentences were contrived and punishment meted out in “trial by Twitter.” Christians who didn’t take sides were shamed or backed into an ideological corner.

Jesus’ response to sin was to open the eyes of each person to their own heart so that no one would condemn another. Clever retorts and condemnations were unnecessary and counterproductive. The response to sin was personal and as private as possible.

What will we do the next time someone dares us to pick up a stone on social media and hurl it at another person?

*SONG: Amazing Grace*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Open your heart to God’s conviction of any sins of gossip, slander, or judgment that you may have committed on social media or in other interactions so that you can confess them.*

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*BIBLE READING: Matthew 7:21-23*

Jesus saw those who were treated the worst by society and reached out to them. His life question was one of inclusion, not exclusion. Jesus didn't teach that we need to abolish our personal or theological views to do this. Jesus was kind to the prostitute, but didn't condone prostitution. Jesus loved the tax collector, though he did not condone skimming money from taxpayers, as the collectors were prone to do. Indeed, Jesus went further. He was willing to lay down his life to include those who were "other."

Jesus says in verse 21 that actions alone are insufficient, even if they closely resembled Jesus' actions, because they do not arise first from a relationship with God.

Who is the one who does God's will? Jesus described God's greatest commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind....Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Christians must not only consider whether their words, actions, non-verbal displays, and very lives truly communicate love, but must know that the source of that love is a deep commitment to and relationship with God.

This focal passage today is startling in that it does not call us to consider a comparison between Christians and non-Christians. Instead, it is a comparison between Christians who love well and treat others kindly, and those who seem to treat others well, but fail to love. To which group will we belong?

*SONG: The Love of God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: What does it mean to love God "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"?*

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