

THE REFORMED CHURCH OF CANAJOHARIE
CANAJOHARIE, NY



LENTEN DEVOTIONS
IN
COVID TIME

Volume 2

For the concluding section of the Devotions in the time of COVID, think of life as being a suitcase. During Lent we are reminded that Jesus' call on us is to take up our cross and follow him. The cross that Jesus wants us to carry is not a small item on a gold chain, it is a large, bulky, cumbersome thing, so we want to have in our life's suitcase only things that are useful and necessary. It's hard to carry extra, as anyone who has rushed through an airport to make your flight knows. So in the next two weeks we will talk first about what needs to come out of the suitcase, the trash, the unnecessary novelties and such, and then about what to pack for the journey. He is taking us on a life-long journey of faith, and we don't want to be weighed down with more than we need.

Pastor Matt

Wednesday, March 10

Unpack Your Fear

READ: Psalm 46

Boo! Scared ya, didn't I? No? How very biblical of you. In Psalm 46 David tells us that in the middle of a cataclysm, with everything falling apart, we will not fear. We may be tempted to say; "Well, David lived in a simpler time. He didn't have the threat of nuclear annihilation or terrorist attack, or even COVID. He didn't live in a system where if you don't get along you have to get out. He wasn't one paycheck away from the poorhouse, one catastrophic illness away from having to live in his car."

It may be a surprise to know that David's life wasn't all wine and roses. He had to face down a giant, be hunted down by the king, find his own son trying to dethrone him, and be responsible for a plague. He lived for a time as an exile, and was a man of war, not because he loved it, but because the situation of his time was chaotic. I don't know if any of us have faced all of these and some of us not even one. Fear, and its constant companion worry, were always at the doorstep, calling on him to change his ways, to slink off and give up.

So why didn't he? It wasn't because he was a superman, or the strongest, most determined man of the bunch. It was because he trusted in God. We will not fear, he says, because God is our refuge and strength. He doesn't rely on his own strength, he relies on God, who is stronger than all calamity. He trusts that God is in charge of his life, and what happens will work for his good, eventually, even if it seems bad while he is living through it. It wasn't fun to be hunted by King Saul. If he was caught he would be killed. But he trusted that whatever happened, God would be watching over him, even if he was being rebuked for his own sin.

That's good for us to remember. If we trust God, we need not fear in this time, not because we are immune from COVID, but because God is still God if we get it. He will work through whatever happens for the best for his people, not what we think is best, but what truly is the best. So the antidote to fear is trust in God. This does not mean we refuse a mask to show that our faith is greater than our fear. Denial is not the same as trust. It means that we trust God to do what is right, and that if the world is suffering under this, there is a reason, and that God is still God.

Thursday, March 11

Unpack Your Pride

READ Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee in the parable you just read is the embodiment of the saying, “There are none so blind as those who refuse to see.” Both he and the publican, or tax-collector are standing in front of a wall in the temple. They did not go together, in case you were asking. But they were close enough that the Pharisee could use the tax collector as an object lesson so that God would understand how grateful he was. I don’t think he is truly comparing himself to him, I think his attitude is truly one of thanksgiving. He gives thanks that he is better than the tax collector, that he has been dealt a better hand, perhaps, and thankful that he has a long string of righteous acts to plume out in front of God. He is like a rich socialite who donates last year’s formal gown and high heels to a homeless woman, and congratulates herself for her generosity. He doesn’t really need to look good in comparison to the tax collector. God already knows he is better, so he thinks.

Jesus has laid this out for his hearers, and then drops the bomb. Lots of folks listening would agree with the Pharisee. They were well aware of the difference in status and holiness between the two. They would identify with the Pharisee, or at least aspire to be like him. And then Jesus drops the bomb. It’s the tax collector who goes home justified. He understands something about himself that is really a universal truth. He needs grace, just as we all do. He has no pride in himself, no excuses to lay before God, nothing to say. His only hope is that God will forgive, so he asks. The Pharisee thinks he has nothing to be forgiven for, so he doesn’t ask. He is blind.

Rather than pride in ourselves, looking back on a string of good works in your past, and reminding God about them all, take the easy way. Dump your pride, and your sense of meriting the favor of God, acknowledge the truth. Like the rest of us, you need the grace of the loving God. And it’s available. So ask for it.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we know the depths to which you went to get us to make us the children of God. We know that they have to be mighty deep to cover my sin. Thank you. Please give me the wisdom to know myself, and to know the grace of God that you bring into my life. I don’t deserve it, but I am grateful. Amen.

SONG Big Shot by Billy Joel

Friday, March 12

Unpack Your Hate

READ Matthew 5:43-45

I used to have two favorite football teams, the New York Giants and whoever Dallas was playing this week. I couldn't stand the Cowboys. If they played the Soviet Red Army team, (if there was one) I would chant "GO Big Red!" There was one time they were playing the Falcons in a playoff game. The Falcons were way ahead, but the Cowboys cheated it out due to the help of some officials who were obviously on the take. (I can feel my blood pressure rising as I type.) And you know what? The Cowboys didn't care what I thought. My hatred, my bile, my tears at the unfairness of it all meant nothing to them. If someone was a fan of the Cowboys, I would curse them under my breath and avoid them. It only made my life smaller. It was all useless. Was there a better option for my life, one that didn't weigh me down?

Jesus tells us there is. Rather than seethe and brood over those you hate, pray for them. Now that doesn't mean I pray for the Cowboys and hope that they win, but I do pray for friends who are their fans. I do playfully poke at the folks who come to Comfort Zone in Cowboys' gear, instead of putting used Kleenex in their bags.

Jesus says that hate is not allowed on the journey. Prayer is, so pray for your enemies. When you do, you treat them as human beings, fellow images of God on the earth. And you keep in step with the Lord's prayer, which asks God to forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors. If we can't forgive, we can hardly demand that God forgive us.

PRAYER: Lord, you broke the barrier of my hate that kept me away from you. Thank you. While I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me, sinful and weak as I am. Help me to turn my back on hate. Give me a heart to pray for those who hate me. Help me forgive their hatred. Don't let it control me. Help me be a grace bearer in their lives. Amen

SONG: "Forgiveness" by Don Henley

Saturday, March 13

Unpack You Covetousness

READ: Luke 12:13-21

Covetousness is an old-fashioned catchall word for things like greed and envy. In the passage Jesus warns us against the urge to build up treasures. His parable about the rich man seems kind of innocuous at first. So he builds bigger barns, so what? Well, think about the fact that a person's wealth was largely measured by what he has on his farm. He was hoarding grain, but didn't want it exposed to the elements. So build more barns. The unfortunate thing is that crops tend to age and grow stale over time. They are not permanent, unless you are Joseph in Egypt, where the desert air enabled them to store up seven years of grain.

Regardless, it has two bad effects. First of all, it takes away from what you can give to and share with those in need. One of the things the Bible teaches us is to give to those in need. In the Old Testament it is part of the law. In the New Testament it is a value that is filled with wisdom. And that is the second effect. When you build up treasures you sell your heart to them. You make them into an idol. You depend on them. You build your life around them. They're like a weight around your neck. And if you try to carry them on the road with Jesus, you will pull your arm out of the socket. If you look through history, you see that covetousness has gotten in the way of peoples' walk with God, and the mission of the church.

So Jesus teaches us that this is a real problem, even though our society values wealth, and gives it lots of power. So how do we get away from it? How do we keep it from weighing us down? Jesus tells us that we are more than what we own or build up. Your life is worth more than what you have. You are precious in God's sight. You are worth more than what you can build up. Understand this. And then, instead of building bigger barns, give your substance away. If your money is weighing you down, give it away. When you do, and it's for the kingdom, you are giving it to God. Being rich isn't wrong, but it makes it hard to live for God.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, you have given us so much. Already we are rich in your son, rich in your Spirit. Help us to treasure that. Help me to get rid of whatever gets in the way of my joy in you. Teach me generosity of spirit, of my substance, and of myself. Amen.

SONG: "Money" by Pink Floyd

Sunday, March 14
Worship With The Sisters And Brothers

Monday, March 15

Unpack Your Resentment

READ: Genesis 4:1-16

No doubt about it, these are challenging times. We have a greater sensitivity to the influence of forces beyond our control. Inconveniences and strictures have a sharper effect on us than in what we might call normal times, or the good old days, even. Because we are so obviously not in control of things, we get resentful of outside control. I was in the Stewart's a couple months ago, and a guy came in without a mask on, so the girl behind the counter told him that he had to cover his mouth before he could be waited on. So he spent five minutes making a scene about how he didn't want to make a scene. I think the war cry of our time could be "Don't make a federal case out of it."

Well, it was a slightly humorous situation, but the fellow was giving voice to the resentment that has exploded into the open. Cain was resentful of Abel, and that resentment was hiding just below the surface. God attempted to reason with him, but to no avail. Cain took his resentment at God not having regard for his sacrifice and laid it out onto Abel.

That's what resentment does. It raises our temperature and makes us prone to blow up at anyone who gets in the way. There may have been a lot of reasons for Cain's resentment, being shown up by his kid brother, anger at himself for not doing his best that got transferred over to Abel, or just a desire to be rebellious against a raw deal handed out to him. All it needed was a likely candidate for punishment. Abel was about the only target around.

When we decide to give in to resentment we find that we set a course that closes our world down. Cain had to leave the presence of God, and his father and mother. He had to give up his calling, farming, and be a wanderer. He was a permanent exile. When we give in to our resentment, the same can happen to us. We lose family, friends, and a place in society even. Our world shrinks down. Most dangerously, it becomes an issue between ourselves and God. We trust God less, and are more prone to walk apart from him. So, unpack your resentment and put it aside. Learn what is the real issue behind your resentment, confess it, and then move on. It will make it easier to walk the path with Jesus.

SONG: "In The Air Tonight" by Phil Collins

Week 5- Now that we have unpacked the suitcase for the road to the cross with Jesus, it's time to repack it. We need to bring along

Tuesday, March 16

Unpack Your Indifference

READ II Kings 20:12-19

There are folks for whom the COVID pandemic hasn't been all bad. For reasons that an economist can help us understand, those who have lots of stocks and bonds have made out like bandits. Those with jobs where they could work at home have suffered from isolation, perhaps, but all in all they have been able to survive and even thrive in the midst of it. Because we have been bubbled up at home, the temptation is to wrap the solitude around ourselves, turn on Netflix or Hulu, and take it easy.

That's where Hezekiah was toward the end of his life. He had been an agent of change in Judah. He called the nation back to God and had been witness to some of the great acts of God during his reign. He had been the recipient of God's healing power. But here, at the end of his life he slipped up. He let the proverbial fox see how fat the hens were, and there was going to be trouble down the road because of it. The Babylonians would be back to collect all the goodies. His response was indifference. As long as it didn't affect him, it was OK.

The good things we have today, even the option of hiring someone to go to the store for you, have lulled us to sleep. We can avoid the knowledge of what an effect the pandemic has had on lots of people. We have been insulated from the world, except for what we see on our favorite news channel. And, as the saying goes, out of sight out of mind. But life is going on out there, some of it sweet, much of it difficult. People are out of work. Suicides are up. And ministry is ongoing. In a world that is dark and gray, the need for the light of Jesus is as present as ever. As we are socially distanced, it's easy to hunker down and stay out of it. It could be dangerous out there, we think. But God still calls us into the world with his love, in whatever way is possible. How can we join him?

SONG: "I Am A Rock" by Simon and Garfunkel

Wednesday, March 17

Unpack Yourself

READ Mark 8:34-38

The theme of this passage is repeated again and again in the New Testament, not only in its companion passages in Matthew and Luke, but also in the letters. Paul tells us, “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ.” (Colossians 3:3) Let your mind be the same as that of Jesus Christ, who did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave”(Phil. 2:4-8). And on and on. To live in Christ is to die to yourself. The fact that churches and Bible teachers gloss over this is a tragedy. If we are going to follow Christ by taking up our own cross we must lay ourselves down, unpacking our metaphorical suitcases and emptying them of ourselves.

Jesus tells us that this is the great paradox. If we try to save ourselves, to hold onto all of our baggage, we will not be able to make the journey. But if we let it all go, if we dump it out and take up the life of Christ, then we will truly live. Then we will live with him. As it says in the Letters, “If we die with him we will live with him,(2Timothy 2) God is not calling on us to do anything that he has not already done himself. To experience true life, we must die to this world and its values and live with Christ. In so doing, we will find life that is truly worth living.

SONG “Dive” by Steven Curtis Chapman

Thursday, March 18

Pack Jesus

READ: John 15: 4-8

The title of this lesson is a little forced. We do not pack Jesus in our suitcase, as if he is a useful tool or possession that we have who will make life easier. Rather, he invites us to abide in him. So in a sense we are put into his suitcase. He wants us to remain, or abide in him, that is to walk alongside him. We are to have him always close to hand, listening to him and following his leading and direction. He is like a compass who decides the way we are to go, our true north, rather than to help us navigate through life. If we abide in him we will follow his will for our lives.

This is an important distinction for us to make. In today's church many are drawn to Jesus because of what he can do for them. That is the sales pitch we use too often. And, being in such a consumer society, how can the church do other. The problem is that sooner or later we discover that our agenda is not the same as what Jesus has planned for us. If we have based our walk on the idea that he is here for us, we get disillusioned. So what is the alternative? Present him as he is, not just for you, but for the world. He is Lord even over Covid. Whatever happens is used by him for his own plans and goals. We get to be along for the ride. We know that whatever happens will be for his glory, and the best for us.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, I pray that you will be the center of my life. Lead me and take me where you want to go. I trust that you will lead me where I need to be, through whatever troubles come my way. Amen.

Friday, March 19

Pack The Word

READ: II Timothy 3:14-17

Back in the old days, my wife and I had very specific duties when we traveled in the car. I was the driver, she was the navigator. This meant folding and unfolding a roadmap, sometimes blocking my vision and concentration with the rustling and flapping. With luck, we were able to get where we wanted to go, even if we took a longcut occasionally.

The Bible is a light to our path through life. We know we are to follow Jesus, the Bible helps us to understand how. Within it we read many accounts of how people followed, and didn't follow, the call of God on our life. Sometimes we learn more from the latter than the former. What not to do can be a better lesson than a "How-to" manual.

If you are new to the word, be careful where you start. In the New Testament, the gospels are a great place to begin, because it introduces you to Jesus. In the Old testament, read Genesis, and the historical books to start. Read a different psalm a day, and don't pile them up in one day. You want to drink and savor their words. Indeed, the prophet Ezekiel is told by God to "Eat this book". That means to linger, study, and savor its meaning. Let it interpret your life, rather than reading into it what you want it to say.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for your word. Help me to read carefully, with a mind opened to your Spirit, so that I may know your heart for this world. Amen.

SONG: "Ancient Words"

Saturday, March 20

Pack Prayer

READ I Thessalonians 5:16-18

To pray and never stop praying seems like a daunting task. When will there be time for anything else? Am I to be a hermit? This shows a latent misconception, that prayer must be done with one's hands folded, in a quiet place with one's eyes closed. Certainly this would not be recommended for driving a car. And yet, the car is one place where I often pray. This is possible because prayer is really a conversation with God. There are lots of men who do their best communicating with each other while driving in a car together. This drives some women crazy, because communication requires eye contact and deep listening for them. Guys, however, find the lack of eye contact comforting, less threatening. The mouths open, and the thoughts come out.

Since it is really difficult to have eye contact with God, this is a good guide for a prayerful conversation with God. Share with God what you see going on around you. Listen to what he says to you. This is more important than speaking in most circumstances. Ask God what he wants you to see. Ask him for the help you need to do what he wants you to do.

Finally, pray boldly. Believe that God can hear your prayer, and that he is in charge of your life, and the lives of others. He can do anything, so bring all your requests to him. Don't second guess your intentions, give it all to God and give thanks while you are doing so. It is God's will for us to pray. He enjoys the conversation. Praying without ceasing is an attitude that we bring to life and our relationship with God. We are not bothering him. He has the time and the ability to listen and hear many prayers from all over the world. He is God, after all, and not a human. Pray without ceasing.

PRAYER: Father, help me trust you that you desire to be in communication with me. Rebuke the spirits that might tell me that you don't have time for me, or that you are too angry to listen. Help me trust that the time for prayer is always present. Amen.

Sunday, March 21

Worship with your church family.

Monday, March 22

Pack Love

READ: I John 4:7-12

God is love. Jesus came to share our lives and die for us because of the love of God for his people. It's the gold standard for love, that is unmatched by no other love in the world. And yet, we are called to love in a manner akin to it. We cannot effect the salvation of people by dying for them. That is the work of Jesus alone. But we can sacrifice ourselves for each other. We can die to ourselves and live for God by reflecting the love of God into the lives of others. In fact, this is a commandment that Jesus gives us.

We can understand this by looking at the word translated "love" in this passage. In Greek there are four different words for love. This word comes from *agape*, love that is self-sacrificial and active. In other words love that shows itself through what we do for others. So love here is not a feeling as much as a decision that results in actions. Other kinds of love are good, but this is the best. This is the one that, as much as possible, is pure giving. Other kinds of love are about what we receive from the one loved, at least to a certain extent. Practicing *agape* love is self-forgetting, a chance to really lay ourselves down and think and act for others. In doing so, we draw nearer to God.

This is why we learned last week that we need to unpack ourselves from the suitcase we carry when we walk with Jesus. The less we pack ourselves, the more room we have for *agape* love. And the easier it will be to walk with Jesus. And, it may be that the suitcase gets bigger, and yet not heavier.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, help me to walk with you. Help me love as you have loved us. Help me to give myself away. Help me to love so that I can draw closer to your mind. Amen.

SONG: "All You Need is Love" by the Beatles

Tuesday March 23

Pack Forgiveness

READ: Matthew 18:21-35

When I was in Junior High a fellow student came up to me when I was just leaving the lunch line and took one of the three pizza buns off my tray. No words, no asking, just a growl. About five years ago I ran across his name on Facebook, and we became Facebook friends. But I couldn't resist the temptation to tell him that he owed me a pizza bun, even after almost forty years. And it makes you think, how deep had that stuck in my craw that I remembered it. I could joke about it, but did I ever forgive him. And was it necessary for him to apologize before I did?

The parable Jesus tells us helps to clarify how important forgiveness is, not just for the one forgiven but primarily for the one doing the forgiving. If we cannot forgive, even for the theft of a pizza bun, how well can we say that we know God. Forgiveness is so important that Jesus often teaches about it in the gospels, and almost always with a warning that if we won't we jeopardize our relationship with God. If there is any element of works in our salvation this is the work that we need to do.

It's so hard. When people have stolen from us, or cast us aside, or rejected us, it is like they are taking away our sense of worth. It diminishes us to be hurt, it dehumanizes us. We want, we feel a need, for retribution, that we need to be restored. The only way we can understand this need for forgiveness is to compare it with the forgiveness God has shown us. So we have the two very different amounts of debt in the parable. Pocket change versus real money. By understanding the incredible debt we owe God, we find that we can forgive others. Not that we can brush all injuries off, like they don't matter. But because of our love for God and our desire to be near him, we find that forgiveness is worth the work. To be with God is better than any grudge we can hold onto.

PRAYER: Lord God, you have borne so much for us, to make us your own children. You have forgiven so much hate, so much rejection on our part that we don't even know or recognize in ourselves. Help me to forgive others as you have forgiven me. Help me to walk in forgiveness of others and of myself. Amen.

SONG: "Forgiveness" by Don Henley

Wednesday March 24

Pack Faith

READ: Hebrews 11:32-40

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews knew his Bible. And he also knew that a life spent walking with God was not always an easy road. In fact, the accounts we read in the Bible tell us that it is very often a hard road, with lots of pain and pitfalls. When he begins this passage with a roll call of the saints from the book of Judges, he does so with the knowledge that none of these people had it easy, that, in fact, much of their pain was self-inflicted. Judges tells us about human nature in all its goodness and all its darkness and sin. And yet, these are held up as examples, not because they were good people, (they weren't) but because they had faith. Earlier on, faith is identified as believing in things that we have not seen, and trusting that we will see them someday.

And so Rahab had faith that God would give her a new people, a new home when her present home was being destroyed. So she hid the spies. Barak believed that even though his family had rejected him because he was the son of a prostitute that God would be his father, and acted accordingly. All of the people listed did great and awesome things because of their faith. And all of them died without fully realizing the greatness of what was coming, because God was reserving that full realization for when all his people from all time will be gathered together. They had faith that the reality that was coming was far superior to the reality they lived in.

That is why people walk with Jesus. They know the way is hard. They know that there is going to be a lot of disappointment along the way. They know that the way of the cross may lead them to death, to trouble, to alienation. But they do it because they are looking forward to something better. They have faith in the promises of God.

PRAYER: Father, you have appointed us a city that we have not seen yet. You have given us a home that we cannot live in yet. We are on the path there, but the way is hard. Help us to have faith that it is better than anything we have seen or tasted, and to trust that it is well worth the journey. Amen.

SONG: "For All the Saints" by William How

Thursday, March 25

Pack a Friend

READ: Acts 2:43-47

“All the believers were together”. Christian faith is personal, but it is not solitary. You don’t get extra points because you walk with Jesus by yourself. We live in a society that likes to emphasize the individual. If we rely on others, then perhaps our achievements are inauthentic. Of courses, you can hear the same sentiment from a three year old who wants to do something “all by self”. As we mature, we learn that walking with Jesus is a collaborative effort, and there is no need to be distant. Within the Trinity, God always cooperates within Himself. The Father and the son send the Spirit, the Spirit speaks to the father, the Father makes his love known through the son, and so on.

So as we walk with Jesus, we walk together. We are individuals, but we are also part of a larger body, the body of Christ. He calls us to walk with him, to follow him together. And he calls us to strive together. This can be hard for those who want the credit, but the thing is that none of us really get the credit. All the praise and glory and credit goes to God.

Right now, in Covid times, it takes effort to make sure we can work and walk together. Social distance is a useful tool to lower the spread. But the need to walk with Jesus together remains. So we pray, we meet virtually, we worship with distance, looking forward to the day when we can be together physically once again. But we are together in spirit. We are united in Christ. So we find ways to express that, through prayer chains, through online study and worship, through reaching out over the phone. And we see this as a momentary adjustment, not a new normal. We will practice patience and love for now, but we pray for the time that we can be together again. And when we are, we will have a new appreciation for being together with the brothers and sisters.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, the way is lonely right now. There are so many reasons to feel alone in the world. We miss being together. Help us not to embrace this solitary existence and patiently await the time when we can be together. Help us to recommit ourselves to fellowship with the body of believers. AMEN

SONG: “Stand by Me” by Ben E. King

Friday, March 26

Jericho

READ: Luke 18:35-43

Very few people were as great an eyewitness to the work of Jesus as those who received their sight back because of him. This man, called Bartimaeus in another gospel, is an example. A lot of people had gathered around Jesus by this time, but this fellow had the full effect. He could give personal testimony to the healing power of Jesus. It is those who have benefitted the most who are the most thankful. IF we have managed to avoid trouble in our life, we can know of the grace of Jesus intellectually. But when we have suffered ourselves we really can taste it.

For myself, this was about finding a new home and place to work in Canajoharie. The timing that brought me here, and the softening of my heart, was all in God's plan, and I am so grateful to be part of God's plan for this community.

So, what have you witnessed about the healing power of Jesus? Has there been a time when something has happened to you that only God can do? Think about it. If you have a testimony about this, then don't be silent. Let people know. Folks need good news in this time. God does great things so that people can testify about them and praise His name, at least in part. Let the world see what the Lord has done for you, so they can give thanks to your father in heaven.

PRAYER: Father, open my eyes so that I can see your truth. Help me not be blind to your grace at work in the world. Thank you so much for including me in your kingdom. May I be a light to the world about you. Amen.

SONG: "I Can See Clearly Now" by Johnny Nash

Saturday, March 27

Jericho II

READ: Luke 19:1-10

The neatest part of the story of Zacchaeus is his response to the grace that Jesus showed him. This grace was not shown in a miracle, aside from the fact that Jesus knew who he was. He might have been told who he was, after all. It was an act of grace, to invite the little guy to come down and then allow him to host Jesus. This has lots of cultural meaning. To be a guest at someone's home was a big endorsement in those days. A lot of the folks there grumbled, because Zacchaeus had been a pariah, and a rich one at that. It would be like the cool kids in the lunchroom making space for a real nerd to sit with them. Not something most people feel secure enough to do. Jesus was not afraid of being painted with the same brush that Zacchaeus was, rather he painted him with his own brush, lifting him up.

In response, Zacchaeus spreads the grace around. He resolves to make everything right and more, not just making everything square between himself and his victims, but going the extra mile. He is a reformed character. This is what Jesus does. It doesn't take a miracle. It takes a belief that the grace of God is stronger than the sin of people. We are used to ideas like one bad apple spoils the barrel, and one bad banana ruins the bunch. But what if when we talk about God, the opposite is true, that he can and does change the apple from bad to good? And if that is the case, can we then have a similar effect? "I am not Jesus" we may say. True. But you are part of his body. He does work through his people, including you. Is it possible that he can use you to lift someone up to him?

PRAYER: Lord, hurting people come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they hide their pain very well. Help me to lift people up, not bring people down. Give me ears to hear what is really going on in their lives, and seek the chance to help. Amen