

***Good Word* Schedule**

“The Role of the Church in the Community”

July, August, September 2016

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Theme: “The Restoration of All Things”

Introduction:

The lessons for this quarter are under the title, “The Role of the Church in the Community.” The primary focus of the lessons for the whole quarter is on God’s restorative work being done by and through the community of believers we call “the Church.” This work is quite wide in its scope and its legitimacy and mandate rest on a number of realities of presumptions that are important to understand. The goal of the whole process is sometimes referred to as “restoration,” that comprehensive work of God that has as its end the diminishing of the effects of sin, even its final eradication at the very end of things.

The whole notion of a restoration is built on the presumption that things are not now the way they were in the beginning. In order for something to be restored, it has to have once had a pristine existence that somehow became compromised so that its current state is less than its original state.

- Consider the original state of this world as it is described in the Genesis creation accounts. How were things then? How are they now?
- Consider what is said about humans, how we were created in the beginning and compare it to the way we are currently constituted.
- Explain what being “made in the image of God” means. What constitutes that “image?” Be sure to think about the major dimensions of human make-up: physical, mental, spiritual.

According to the Bible, the pristine nature of things as they were in the beginning was disrupted in very serious manner by the appearance of sin. The appearance of sin and the effects it brought upon this earth and those in it, is known as “the fall.”

- The idea of a fall caused by sin is not much spoken of today because it flies very much in the face of the current view of humans, that we are pristine

selves encumbered by all the “junk” from our families, societies, religions, etc. The current view of humans does not leave room for corruption by sin. How can Christians still teach about the fall without getting crosswise with culture?

- What were the immediate effects of the fall?
- What were the intermediate effects of the fall?
- What are the ultimate effects of the fall?
- What are the effects of ignoring the fall, pretending that it is of no consequence?
- What part of the world or human experience is not affected by the fall?
- Why is the idea of a fall so important to the biblical understanding of things and to the Christian faith?

It is the very fact of a fall that makes the gospel such good news, that God, working through the person and life and ministry of Jesus, has made provision for the restoration of earth and those on earth who trust him.

- Why is the person of Jesus, his nature, so important to the idea of restoration?
- What do you think will get changed during the process of restoration?
- When will the work of restoration be fully completed?
- What is the role of humans in this process of restoration?
- How do you think the church, defined as the community of believers, should participate in the restoration God is working to accomplish here on earth? In other words, in what particular areas do you think the church should be making efforts to help with the restoration?

Theme: “Restoring Dominion”

The lesson this week asks us to reflect on a word that usually has some rather negative connotations, the word “dominion.”

- Talk about the usual meaning of the word “dominion” and the various connotations that are usually associated with it.

According to the Genesis 1:26-28, the humans God created were given “dominion” (KJV language) over the earth. The kind of dominion envisioned here is not the adverse sort of dictatorship-style of things as much as it is the responsibility to nurture, care for, and administer the functions of creation at least as far as humans can do that. Notice in particular the comment about caring for and dressing the garden.

- What do you make of the fact that the dominion in Genesis was given to both the man and the woman. In other words, the elements of dominion were given equally to Adam and to Eve. What points to you take from this?
- Within what limitations do you think this dominion had to be exercised? What was appropriate for Adam and Eve to do and what was not appropriate?
- What does the fact that dominion was given to the humans say about their place in the created order?
- What kind of responsibilities come with privilege?
- What is the worst “sin” a person with dominion can make? What are the effects of this bad behavior likely to be on those under their dominion?
- What might we conclude about the responsibility to care of this earth given that originally, dominion was given to humans?

According to the biblical story, when Adam and Eve sinned, they lost their dominion. It was taken from them, or it slipped from their grasp and Satan became the one who usurped it claiming to be the ruler of the earth. Here is the foundational source of a lot of the troubles we see in the world.

- If it is God's intention to restore this dominion to humans, what is that likely to involve?
- What should be the role of the gospel in restoring the relationship of men and women given that their original dominion was shared?
- How far do you think the gospel can take us toward restoring the ideal?
- How can humans prevent themselves and each other from abusing the privileges that come with dominion?

GOOD WORD 2016.3
Community
Lesson #3 - July 16
8:4-7;

20:35

WWU

Role of the Church in
Ex 22:21-23; 23:2-9; Amos
Isa 1:13-17; 58:1-14; Acts

– prepared by David Thomas, School of Theology,

Theme: “Justice & Mercy in the Old Testament: Part 1”

In the biblical story, the ideal and pristine situation of Adam and Eve was lost when sin came in. Subsequent to that unhappy day, God initiated a process designed to bring about restoration of what was lost. In the Bible, this process plays out throughout the whole biblical story particularly along the themes of mercy and justice, two characteristics that are highly prized by God. Today we look at some examples of these two elements of restoration as they were on display in the Old Testament.

- Notice the provisions made in Exodus 22:21-27, 23:2-9, Lev. 19:10.
- Notice the provisions in the Sabbath commandment and in the Year of Jubilee instructions. Exo. 20:8-10, Lev. 25:8-55

Reading these verses quickly reveals that God has some particular concerns particularly about those who happen to be disadvantaged for some reason or other. This concern extended beyond humans to include also the animals.

- What is God’s particular concern mentioned having to do with strangers and sojourners?
- What happens when those in power pervert justice?
- What happens when people accept bribes?
- What do you think the effects of the Jubilee Year were on the value of things? And how do you think this idea of a Jubilee year affected the cycle of poverty that so often traps people from generation to generation?
- Why do you think wives are not specifically mentioned in the Sabbath Commandment?

- How do you think an observance of the Sabbath would help in the grand restoration God is working on?

Another place in which we sense God's concern for justice and mercy is in the words, sometimes cutting words, of the prophets.

- A general statement can be found in Proverbs 31:8, 9. How would you apply the principles there today?
- Read Isaiah 1:13-17 and reflect on how corruption affects even worship, how God would rather have justice and mercy present than people going through worship rituals.
- Notice how strong the language used in these verses is, particularly as they describe God's feelings and potential actions.
- Read Isa. 58:1-14 and reflect on what you read there.

It almost goes without saying that simply being aware of God's ideas and desires amounts to very little, perhaps even nothing, unless it results in action. Justice and mercy are only vague ideas if they are not real.

- When last did you act in behalf of some poor or disadvantaged person?
- When last did you speak out in favor of the down-trodden or powerless?
- What do you think your church can do to help affect good change in your neighborhood?

GOOD WORD 2016.3
Community
Lesson #4 - July 23
47:1-8;

Role of the Church in
Ezek 37:1-14; Eph 2:10; Ezek

Matt 5:16; Rev 22:1,2; Isa 61:1-11

– prepared by David Thomas, School of Theology,

WWU

Theme: “Justice & Mercy in the Old Testament: Part 2”

This week we continue with the theme that was begun last week, that of listening to the voices in the Old Testament that speak to both justice and mercy.

- Notice the restoration recitation found in Ezek. 37:1-14.
- Where does the power for restoration come from?
- What role do humans play in this process of restoration if the power comes from God?

One of the metaphors or images used in the Old Testament to illustrate restoration is found in Ezekiel 47:1-8, that of a river of water flowing along its way. In verse 9 of the same chapter is a statement that swarms of living creatures will live in and near the river.

- What ideas come to mind when you think of your congregation as a river flowing in its neighborhood?
- What do you think your church could do in order to function as a river in its location?

Another image found in the Old Testament is that of a declaration of good news brought through an anointed one who would bring good news to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim freedom to the captives (Isa. 61:1-11).

- What kind of freedom could your church proclaim in its location?
- What captives could it work to free?

Micah 6:8 is a well-known text that creates quite a noble and exciting mandate for believers who are called on to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

- How do you and your church measure up to this ideal?

- What do you think the opinion of unbelievers would be of the church if all its members worked hard to live by the ideals in Micah 6:8?

A very interesting passage of scripture is found in Amos 5:21-24. It comments in particular on the actions of religious people who were quite particular about observing all their rituals while at the same time neglecting the poor and needy. To be more precise, it comments on God's opinion about those who are careful to practice their rituals while neglecting those in need. The prophet does not spare the rod, so to speak, but castigates the people for this eventuality telling them in no uncertain terms that God would prefer they neglect the rituals he established in favor of them doing good to those in need.

- What do you think a prophet like Amos would say to religious people today?
- What kind of obligation do religious people have to those who choose not to help themselves?
- Have you ever thought about what you would say to your Savior one day if you made it a practice of being hard or cheap in your helping of those who are powerless or in need?
- What should be preferred, raising awareness about needs, or actually working to help relieve it?

GOOD WORD 2016.3
Community
Lesson #5 - July 30

13:3-9
Theology, WWU

Role of the Church in

Luke 4:16-19; 10:25-37; Matt 5:13; Is 2:8;
John 4:35-38; Matt

– prepared by David Thomas, School of

Theme: “Jesus on Community Outreach”

Matthew 4:23 provides an opening thought for this week’s lesson. It reads, “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.”

This week, we take up the subject of Jesus and the work he did alleviating distress in the areas in which he lived and worked.

The lesson begins with the recitation of a very interesting event in the life of Jesus. It is recorded in Luke 4:16-19, a familiar incident in which Jesus was in the synagogue in Nazareth, the town he grew up in, and he is to read the scripture portion for the day. He reads from Isaiah 61:1,2 a passage that is known to be a messianic scripture, one that points forward to the “one who is to come,” who preaches good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners, sight to the blind, release for the oppressed, and a jubilee restoration to those down-trodden. Jesus stopped short of the next phrase, “the day of vengeance of our God” leaving people to contemplate the up-lift work that was to be done by the Messiah. Jesus then added the famous words, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears” indicating that he was the Messiah and that he was about to take up the work of delivering people from their various forms of bondage. Studying his example, then, becomes informative for those wanting to emulate his working.

Probably the most famous of Jesus teachings comes in the form of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable is precipitated by the inquiry of a very good man as to who his neighbor was. As is true today, it is common to consider those who are like us to be our neighbors. But the parable teaches something far more radical, that those who are in most need are our neighbors. The astonishing and surprising element in the parable is that the man who was most despised ended up doing the most righteous thing. And the lesson is clear, that the distinctions of race and social status are not to be determinants on who we count as neighbor. Whoever is in most need is our neighbor.

It is also significant that the Samaritan inconvenienced himself while being of help. Not only did he go out of his way, he paid expenses that must be thought of as costly. We are left to contemplate when we last acted in a manner even remotely similar to the actions of the Good Samaritan.

Another interesting element in the lesson arises from Jesus comments, "You are the salt of the earth. And if the salt has lost its savor, of what use is it?" The indication here is that those who would spread the influence of the Kingdom abroad, may work quietly but they do need to work, spreading influence around even if subtly.

It becomes a serious question to consider, how believers today may do in our context what Jesus did in his context, working to alleviate the struggles of those who are down-trodden right where they live.

- Of what value is a congregation that has nothing to contribute to the well-being of the community in which it exists?
- How would you reach out to people who sense they had no need of anything?
- What ideas can you come up with that would enable believers to mingle with those outside their fellowship and do so in ways that are advantageous to Kingdom purposes?
- Should Christians become involved in the various political functions where they live with the intent of using them to aid good deeds?
- Tell the parable of the Good Samaritan in modern terms. What ideas come to you after doing that?

**GOOD WORD 2016.3
Community**

**Lesson #6 – Aug 06
9:10-13;**

2:13-15

WWU

Role of the Church in

Matt 1:22,23; John 1:14; Luke 15:3-24; Matt

Ps 51:17; 1 John 2:16; Phil

– prepared by David Thomas, School of Theology,

Theme: “Jesus Mingled with People”

One of the most interesting, or curious, accusations ever made against Jesus, one that warrants careful thought, is the one found in Luke 15:1, 2 where it is said of him, that those in religious authority said, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Several thoughts emerge from this accusation:

- Who would you assume these “sinners” to be? Criminals? The poor? The outcasts of society? The homeless? The irreligious? Do you associate with any such people? And if not, how much like Jesus are you?
- It says that Jesus ate with them. Eating with someone is a very significant happening. It presumes a measure of trust has been extended for you have sat down with them. It speaks of time taken to share the meal. It speaks of some time given to conversation, to sharing conversation, inquiring about the other person. And it presumes a certain level of vulnerability and commonality. Beyond all this, it is a very human thing to do, sharing that which gives live with someone who might not be able to obtain it for him/herself.
- Have you ever been in any danger of being accused of associating with sinners? What would it do to your reputation were you to be charged with such a thing?

There is a very famous saying in our circles that Jesus method was to mingle with people as one who desired their good, who showed them sympathy, who cared for their needs, who won their trust. It was only after that that he bade them to follow him.

- What happens to an invitation if the giving of it is preceded by providing obvious care for those to whom you wish to extend an invitation?

- How could you mingle with people today enough to win their confidence?

In Luke 15 can be found three little parables having to do with lost-ness, the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son.

- What are the similarities found in these parables?
- What differences do you see in the parables?
- What great lessons for life could you draw from these parables?
- What is the most powerful element that you find in the parable of the lost son?
- What draws the son back to his father's home and how could you make that applicable in today's society?
- How do you think the common perception of God comports with who He really is and what he is really like?

In Matthew 9:10-13, there is recorded another interchange between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day the main issue of which is his association with sinners. The presumption was that a good person would NOT associate with sinners. Yet Jesus did so freely.

- Why are sinners so disliked by righteous people? Are those reasons really valid in light of God's association with us?
- What happens in the lives of those who do see themselves as sinners?
- What is the effect of seeing yourself to be a sinner on your life and belief system?
- How many friends do you have outside the boundaries of your believing community? Is that a good thing, or do you need to work on deliberately adjusting that number?
- How does the admonition to be in the world but not of it play out here?
- Why do religious rituals and protocols become so important to us that we desire to protect and tend them even to the exclusion of those who are on the "outside?" Evaluate this practice.

- How does a community protect and “police” its boundaries without becoming exclusivistic? And what happens if it has no boundaries?
- What can be said about churches that expend more energy bickering over internal issues than on positively affecting their communities?

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Community

Lesson #7 – Aug 13

5:43-47;

2:14-17

WWU

Role of the Church in

Jonah 3:4-4:6; Luke 19:38-42; Matt

1 Cor 13; Mark 8: 22-25; Phil 2:3-5; James

– prepared by David Thomas, School of Theology,

Theme: “Jesus Desired Their Good”

This week the lesson begins with a very moving passage of Scripture that reveals the love Jesus had for the city in which he ministered, the incident recorded in Matthew 23:37 where is recorded his tearful remonstrance where he cried over Jerusalem saying he would fain have gathered it and its citizens under his wings like a hen gathers her chickens to protect them, but the inhabitants would not. This is one dramatic instance where we see that Jesus desired the good of those to whom he had come.

- What does it mean to desire the good of others?
- What is the motivation for this kind of usually selfless thing?
- Where does the motivation for doing this kind of thing come from?

And interesting contrast is found in the story of the ancient prophet Jonah and the attitude he manifested toward Nineveh after he had predicted its downfall only to see God showing mercy to it – Jonah 3:4-4:6.

- Do some study on the reputation of the inhabitants of Nineveh, the Assyrians. You will likely be shocked at their practices especially when at war.
 - Would God be just if he did not act against such people?
 - What insights did you gain into the possible reasons why Jonah was reluctant to go to Nineveh?
- What do you think caused Jonah’s attitude? Was it wounded pride? Was it fear of being charged with failure? Was it that the repentance of the Ninevites cause God to relent thereby preventing the wiping out of Israel’s great enemies?

- What do you think Jonah would need to have done in order to have a charitable reaction to the change in the mindset of those in Nineveh?

There is in the official lesson a very interesting principle stated. It was called the "Anyway" principle. Its basic contention is that we are to serve people "anyway," in spite of their reaction or response. This principle can be seen in action in several places:

- Matt. 8:1-4 where Jesus heals a leper who came to him regardless of the reactions against him.
- John 18 where Peter denies Jesus three times but Jesus still manifests love toward him.
- 2 Cor. 12:14, 15 where the Corinthian church is unappreciative of Paul's ministrations yet he works with them anyway.
- Matt. 7:12 where can be found Jesus' Golden Rule.
- Luke 6:35 where we are admonished to do good even to our enemies.

There is mention of the great love chapter of the Bible, I Corinthians 13. After reading that thoughtfully, reflect on what never fails.

In his letter to the Philippian Church, Paul laid out a rather challenging bit of advice, so hard to do yet so good and necessary, and so much like God – Phil. 2:3-5 where we are told to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit but to humbly value others above ourselves.

- How does a person retain a sense of self and personhood if they are always working for others? Is this not an open door to mistreatment?
- How does a person preserve personal boundaries and yet give themselves to service?
- How does a church adjust itself to being open and accepting without also creating some boundaries for itself and preserving them lest it become nothing? Or, put another way, how do we have boundaries which seem to be necessary for good living, and yet be open and receptive to those who are different?

GOOD WORD 2016.3
Community
Lesson #8 – Aug 20
3:17

1:3,4

WWU

Role of the Church in

2 Kings 13:23; Ex 2:23-25; Luke 7:11-16; 1 John

3:17
John 11:35; Rom 12:15; 2 Cor

– prepared by David Thomas, School of Theology,

Theme: “Jesus Showed Sympathy”

The lesson this week invites us to think and talk about sympathy particularly in light of what we may learn from Jesus about sympathy.

There are two foundational texts to this lesson one of which is the shortest verse in all the Bible:

- Matthew 14:14 – “And when Jesus went out he saw the great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for the, and healed their sick.” (NKJV)
- John 11:35 – “Jesus wept.”

These two passages are enough to engage with the subject of sympathy. They indicate that Jesus was moved with compassion by the difficulties and sufferings of those with whom he came in contact.

- The word “sympathy” means “with pathos.” In other words, it means to be with someone or alongside someone while in a sympathetic frame of mind. It implies mingling with them in their sorrow or difficulty in a way that shares their pain with them.
- Make a list of ways in which sympathy can be generated and shown.

We could very quickly catch a glimpse of what would be involved with showing sympathy when we pause long enough to make a list of the woes of earth!

- What kind of list could you make, given even a few minutes, of all the struggle, pain, and woes known to you?
- Expand your personal knowledge to what you would imagine to be the case if you had the perspective of a person who could see the whole of our planet and all its goings-on.

- The cause of all the struggles of earth are rooted in the tragic story of the loss of innocence of our first parents, a day when sin came to stay, something no-one living today had anything to do with yet it affects life nonetheless.

One of the most common reactions we have to all the trouble we see is to gloss it over or distract ourselves for nobody could face up to the whole scene alone. This kind of thing can tend toward inaction, something we would probably agree is improper for Christians. At the same time, getting involved can be very challenging:

- It is said of General William Booth, founding father of the Salvation Army, that when a person came along who was interested in helping with what he was doing, he would respond by telling them, "If you can't cry over the city, we can't use you."
- Does the fact that most of us pay taxes some of which get used in relief work absolve us of at least some responsibility for caring for the downtrodden?
- What do you think about "secular" agencies that work for the betterment of struggling humans?
- Do you think every denomination should have its own relief work, or do you think this might be a place where there could be a lot of collaboration by Christians?
- It is a common thing for "activists" today to demonstrate and create pressures of various kinds in order "to raise awareness" of something. Does that kind of thing actually help those in need or is it an easy way out of providing real help to those in need.
- When last did you inconvenience yourself to help someone?
- What can you do when tragedy strikes to the point words are inadequate to salve the pain and sorrow?
- How do you like it when people say, "I'll pray for you." Is that a sincere response or is merely a platitude most of the time? What could you do that had more significance than such words?

- What can you do within the sphere of your own living to become known as a sympathetic person?
- What actions can a church or congregation take in order to manifest sympathy in this broken world?
- Tell some stories of sympathies given and also of some received. Why do you remember the details of such stories?

Theme: “Jesus Ministered to Their Needs”

The lesson this week begins with a truly remarkable verse, found in Matthew 9:35 – “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.” (NIV).

This verse is remarkable for several reasons. First, it speaks to the common-ness of Jesus, telling how he went about through all the towns and villages, teaching and caring for the people he met. No limousines for him, no crowd carrying him aloft. He had a common touch. He walked in and among the people helping those who were in need. Secondly, he healed all their diseases. Can you imagine what a village looked like after he had been there awhile, with all its diseases gone!

One of the most moving and dramatic incidences of Jesus helping is found in Mark 5:22-43 where there is a multi-tiered story of Jesus providing help, first to a ruler of a synagogue whose little daughter was dying of a fever a story that was interrupted by the woman who touched his garment wanting to be healed. This train of events is interesting because we see how Jesus reacted to what amounted to an unexpected interruption. He was on his way to help the synagogue leader when the woman interrupted his passage. Most of us would be quite annoyed by such a thing as going to help in one place is likely already an inconvenience. Yet Jesus does not consider the appeal of the woman to be an interruption. He stops and engages in conversation with her and, in so doing, teaches us that sometimes the best opportunities to be of help come via inconvenience.

- Have you realized yet that ministering to the needs of someone is almost always inconvenient? People do not come asking for help after you have eaten and done the dishes hence having little to do for a while. They come right as food is being put on the table!
- Can you explain why some of the greatest opportunities for ministering to people’s needs show up as interruptions?

- Do you remember how you responded last time someone who was in need of help interrupted you?

When talking of biblical examples of people who were known for helping, one cannot overlook the story of Dorcas, a woman who is called in Scripture, a “disciple.” This is the same word used to describe or name the other disciples! She was especially noted for the care she had for the widows of her town, widows being then some of the most vulnerable of persons. Some of those widows were, no doubt, in her community of faith, but others were most certainly not. She cared for them all.

- Are there any Christian believers where you live who are known for their kindness and persistent care of the down-trodden and forgotten?
- Who do you think the “widows” of today are?
- One of the most remarkable things about Dorcas is that, apparently because her work was so crucial to the work of God in that area, she was raised from the dead in order to continue her efforts.
- It is worth noting that in many countries, Christian’s have established aid societies in the name of Dorcas.

It should be noted that providing help to someone often opens the door to the discussion of deeper things, not to exclude the prospect of spiritual things. But certainly, the desire to talk of spiritual things should never be the determiner of whether or not help will be offered.

- Why are some people so willing to help while others seldom do?
- What do you think provides the motivation to be helpful? Do you think it is always the same motivations that is at work?

A very important lesson to take home this week is that helping involves action. At some point something actually has to be done if help is to be had.

GOOD WORD 2016.3
Community
Lesson #10 – Sep 03
6:1-3;

Role of the Church in

Gen 15:6; Num 14:11; 1 Cor 3:1-9; Dan

Neh 2:1-9; Deut 4:1-9; Acts 2:42-47

– prepared by David Thomas, School of Theology,

WWU

Theme: “Jesus Won Their Confidence”

During this quarter, we are looking at Jesus as an example of working toward the restoration of humans, lifting them up from the degradation that seems to be so often a major feature of human experience. This week, we are invited to focus on the way Jesus won the confidence of those whom he tried to help. A few moments of thought will bring to mind the realization that winning the confidence of someone, or a body of people, is a very good way to gain access into their minds and lives thereby generating some hope of seeing change.

Luke 5:15 is pertinent to this discussion for it give some clues into how successful Jesus was in winning people’s confidence – “But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.”
(ESV).

- Confidence is the willingness to trust or have faith in someone or something. What are some of the elements that lead to the growth of such confidence? Would you list fidelity, honesty, reliability, constancy, reliability, vulnerability as a possible components?
- What happens to the confidence people might put in you if you fail to be constant or reliable?
- How would you go about recovering confidence that got lost?
- Think about how much more opportunity you would have to influence a group of people who trusted you vs. one that was suspicious of you.
- What does faith in God look like? What would a high level of faith in God look like to those looking in upon it?
- The fact of people having faith in you could lead to selfish ends such as self-aggrandizement. What would you do to prevent that from happening?

- Talk about the kind of vision or picture people would get of God if you or the church you are part of were the only sermon they ever heard.

“Social Capital” is a phrase that is sometimes used when talking about confidence or trust and what they produce. Social capital is a valuable thing because it results in you being given the benefit of the doubt in whatever circumstances come along. It seems clear that Jesus enjoyed a good deal of social capital with a lot of the common people but not so much with the religious leaders. One place to look at in the Bible that evidences some good social capital and the use that can be made of it, is the story of Nehemiah as found in Nehemiah 2:1-9. These verses deal with that often-neglected period of time after the great Babylonian Captivity ended. It was a time of turmoil not so much in Babylon but in Jerusalem, the place where the exiles hoped to return to. After reading the passage just mentioned above, meditate on the following questions:

- How do you think Nehemiah was able to gain social capital with the King?
- What do you think the reaction of the King would have been to Nehemiah’s request had he not held Nehemiah in great esteem?
- Talk about what your congregation could do to earn social capital in the area where it is situated.
- Do you think your city or town would miss your congregation if it suddenly disappeared?
- Notice the comment in Acts 2:42-47 where it is stated the fact that the early Christian church enjoyed the favor of “all the people.” That offers up quite a challenge for congregations today.

Theme: “Jesus Bade Them - Follow Me”

The lesson this week is under the title, “Jesus Bade them, Follow Me.” This title, in a very brief way, points to the ultimate goal or purpose for the time Jesus spent on earth, and, in fact, for the whole of his efforts in behalf of humans. Scripturally speaking, humans are in a real predicament. We are damaged enough by sin that we cannot arrive in paradise by our own merits. It is for this reason that we are invited to follow Jesus, to emulate him, to allow him and the Holy Spirit to work in us for the purposes of transforming us. John 10:1-5 is listed as a key text for this week. The passage is interesting because it uses the metaphor of a shepherd and his sheep, how the sheep follow the shepherd.

The sheep/shepherd relationship is one that we are not so familiar with anymore, but it is one that was quite familiar to people in the days of Jesus. Of particular interest is verse 5 that reads, “But they [the sheep] will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” (NIV).

- Without being trite, express the connections you see between the sheep being familiar with the shepherd’s voice and believer’s being familiar with the “voice” of Jesus.
- What makes us reluctant to follow the voice of an unfamiliar person? On what grounds is our reluctance justified?
- Given the fact that Jesus is not with us in the form of a person, how can a believer come to know his voice? Put another way, what is this “voice” thing?
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In Mark 1:17, Jesus invited the disciples to follow him. He then gave a reason for his invitation, and “I will make you fishers of men.” Here the purpose of Jesus calling people to follow him is expanded to include those who accept his invitation.

Just as he called them to follow him, he anticipates that those who respond will, in turn, make invitations to others.

- We now live in a society that is increasingly hostile toward people who have clear and strong beliefs. Christianity is certainly a religion with strong beliefs. In view of this, how do you think you can attract unbelievers to the Christian faith?
- What do you think might draw people to the Christian faith and, in particular, to the church where you worship?
- When last did you tell to someone else the story of your religious journey? In times past, this was known as “sharing your testimony.” What kind of story would you be able to tell at the present moment? What makes testimonies so powerful and inviting?

Revelation 3:20 and Deuteronomy 4:29 are verses that speak about seeking the Lord and doing so with all our hearts. In other words, Jesus is knocking at the door of our hearts and we are to respond by letting him in. Or, to use another metaphor, we will find God when we seek for him with great diligence. In view of this, several questions come to mind:

- Talk about the dynamic of a door that has a handle only on the inside. If someone knocks at such a door, how do they get in?
- Why do you think that God does not “force” himself upon humans but rather invites them to let him in?
- What does “seeking the Lord with all our hearts” look like? How would you know if someone were doing that?
- What would hinder a person going on such a quest?

GOOD WORD 2016.3
Community
Lesson #12 – Sep 17

Role of the Church in

Acts 18-1-28; Ex 2:23-25; Matt 13:3-9;
Matt 13:18-23; John 15:12, 13; 2

Pet 3:9

– prepared by **David Thomas, School of Theology,**

WWU

Theme: “Urban Ministry in the End Time”

The lesson this week has as its focus the topic of urban ministry and, to focus it even more, urban ministry in the time of the end. In order to engage this subject, we need to talk about a couple of things. First, what is this “End Time” idea? Briefly stated, it is a phrase that is best understood as being descriptive of the biblical idea that time as we know it will not continue forever. In a lot of places, the Bible speaks of another age that is to come, an age that will be quite different from the present one in that evil and wrong will not exist in the new age. The transition from the present age to the future one is something that will be done by God who will, at some point, interrupt the flow of earth’s history to institute the new age. And the transition period between the ages is predicted to be very tumultuous, even cataclysmic. The lesson this week asks us to think about how urban people can be evangelized in the era leading up to this tumultuous period that will mark the transition between the ages.

A major passage from Acts is to be used as a guide here – Acts 18:1-28. Read this over before continuing. Glean from it some methodologies used by the Apostle Paul and others to impact the cities of their age with the news of the gospel.

Also included here should be consideration of Jeremiah 29:7, a text in which the ancient prophet, speaking to his own people who were going into exile, said the following: “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

- Think about what it would mean if Christian were known for praying for the prosperity of the cities and communities in which they live.
- How are cities today different from the cities in Paul’s day? What might that do to the strategies for reaching out with the Christian message?
- One of the major features of cities is that they bring together all kinds of people who have very different life-styles and very different ideas, who

then have to live in close proximity. When is close proximity, it is very difficult to be constantly hostile. What then do urban people do in order to live peaceably? How would that affect the propagation of the Christian message?

- Another feature of cities is the existence of obvious poverty and great need. What might Christians and their churches do to address such things? And what would the effect of such actions be?
- How effective would urban ministry be if left up to official clergy only?
- One of the major features of the way the Apostle Paul worked was his personal interaction with people, particularly influential people. How might that be done today?
- Is it best to work for people in the cities by setting up outposts outside the urban area or is it better to move right into the neighborhoods and become known?
- What do you think would make Christianity attractive to urban city dwellers?

It is certainly true that cities present Christians (or anyone who wants to affect their citizens) with an enormous challenge. It is one thing to visit and speak with people in rural areas. Certainly, rural people have their ways. But it is an entirely different thing to try to speak to the vast masses of the cities. Further, cities are growing very rapidly compared to rural populations. What to do with such a challenge?

Theme: “How Shall We Wait”

We come now to the last of the lessons for this quarter, the last dealing with the big question of the role of the Christian Church in the community.

The lesson title, “How Shall we Wait?” warrants some comment for it has in it an indication that must not be missed. While we wait from the transition from the present age to the future one, what should the characteristics of our living and waiting be?

- Do you like to wait? What is good about waiting? What is bad about it? What do you do in order to wait “well?” What makes waiting intolerable?

At the start of the lesson, there are some very interesting few verses taken from Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 12:11-13. In these verses are some hints as to how best to wait. ~ ¹¹ *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* ¹² *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

¹³ *Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*” There is quite a list that calls for some reflection:

- What would “Never be lacking in zeal” look like?
- What does it mean to “keep spiritual fervor,” and how does one go about doing that?
- Notice that “serving the Lord” is a good element when waiting is called for. Perhaps you heard the story of the Dark Day back in 1833 or so, where the day got very dark and people wondered what was happening. Some suggested it was the end of the world. In the Connecticut State Legislature on that day, the elected officials were meeting and word came to them of the outside phenomenon. Someone suggested the all quit and go home, but one senator put an end to that idea by saying that, if the darkness were a

sign of the end of the world and the Lord's coming, he would just as soon be found at work as anywhere else!

- What do you make of the link between joy and hope in these verses?
- How does one be patient in affliction? Any ideas?
- Prayer is a very big subject and one not always easy to understand. Here is an admonition to be faithful in prayer while waiting. What dynamic does prayer bring to life?
- Notice the admonition to share with those who are in need.
- Think about hospitality. Have you ever experienced it? What did it bring into your life? Have you ever extended it? Did it inconvenience you? Did it benefit you? What happens when people are not hospitable?
- What happens to zeal if there is a sense that there is yet before us an endless number of days?
- What brings urgency into your religious life?
- Peter in his letter (2 Peter 3), challenge the Christians of his day with the words, "What manner of persons ought you to be?" He said this right after talking about the tumult that is predicted to accompany the transition between the two ages already spoken of?

Something that should not escape the thoughts of those who believe in Jesus is the promise he made more than once, the promise that he would come again to this earth to catch up those who believe in him.

- Read Revelation 21:1-4 and meditate on the picture that emerges from that passage.
- Hope that has an end-goal is hope indeed!