



Session Eight

The Gospel of Luke, Pt.5

Luke 8:19-9:50

Questions to consider as you read Luke 8:19-9:50

1) In reading 8:19-21, you may find it instructive to read Mark's version of this event (3:20-21) where Mark ascribes a motivation to Jesus' family in seeking him out that Luke does not. In any case, what do Jesus' words in 8:21 suggest is the determining factor in what constitutes "family" in the Kingdom?

Beginning with 8:22, Luke narrates three events that demonstrate Jesus' power over, in this order, nature, demons, and illness and death. Consequently, they continue to explore Jesus' identity as Messiah (e.g. 8:25) and what being the Messiah means.

2) In reading 8:22-25, comparison with Mark's version of the event (4:35-41) is again instructive. Note the elements included in Mark not present in Luke. There is a geographical fact that should also be noted: in crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus is moving from a predominantly Jewish area to a predominantly Gentile area (see Luke 8:26). What Jesus does in the crossing of the Sea is plain enough: he stills a storm, prompting the disciples to wonder yet again about Jesus' identity (8:25). Do you see any application of this event to your own life and/or the world today?

- 3) There are a number of things going on the story of the Gerasene demoniac (8:26-39).
- What is significant about the fact the first person Jesus encounters in stepping off the boat is someone living outside town, in a cemetery, possessed by demons?
 - What is the significance of the fact that the evil spirit(s) recognize Jesus as "Son of the Most High God" when Jesus' own disciples are still struggling to understand his identity?
 - Why would the spirits beg Jesus not to be sent into the Abyss?

d) Luke tells us that the people asked Jesus to leave them because they were afraid (8:35). But look at Mark 5:16 which suggests that as much as people were afraid they were annoyed that Jesus' actions had cost them their pigs. Do you see any parallel between this and people's reactions to Jesus today?

4) Luke 8:40-56 is an example of something we encounter in the Gospels, especially in Luke and Mark, and especially involving healing narratives: an interlacing of two stories where one story begins, is interrupted by the telling of a second story, then the first story is completed. More than a narrative device, the sandwiching of one narrative within another invites us to read one relative to the other. In this case, the two narratives speak to the authority of Jesus and, in Jairus and the woman with a hemorrhage, the power of faith.

a) Note the extent to which these two narratives are about proximity: Jairus, long before Jesus is physically present in his house, believes Jesus has the power to heal his daughter; and the woman, who believes she only has to get close enough to Jesus to touch the hem of his cloak (Jesus does not, in other words, have to touch her) to be healed. What does this suggest about "belief" and "faith" particularly in light of Jesus' words in 8:48? (By the way, the Greek word translated "faith" in 8:48 is the same as the word translated "believe" in 8:50: *pistis*).

b) Why does Jesus make such an issue of knowing who touched him?

c) In 8:52 Jesus says something which, taken at face value is laughable, which is why those who heard him say it laughed: "She is not dead but asleep." But Jesus was not just being sloppy in his choice of adjectives: he said "sleep" for a very specific—and very profound—reason. Do you have any idea what that might be?

d) We noted above that in crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus moved from a predominantly Jewish area to one largely populated by Gentiles. While there, he touches a demoniac and, in Jairus' daughter, a dead body, and is touched by a woman with a hemorrhage, any one of which would have made Jesus "unclean." Yet Jesus willingly heals and brings wholeness and life to all three. Do you see any implications of this for Jesus' claim to bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles?

5) 9:1-6 is the first of four scenes in Luke in which the disciples/apostles are commissioned. The other three are sending the 70 in pairs (10:1-11), Jesus' preparation of the disciples/apostles for their post-Easter mission (22:35-38), and the commissioning of the 11 and others in 24:48-49. As such, the idea of sending forth is clearly important. What does this suggest about our own understanding of discipleship?

6) Jesus is very explicit in his instructions to the 12 in (9:3-5). Other than the obvious, what do these precise instructions mean? What are the implications of these instructions for our understanding of the practice of hospitality?

7) Herod's questioning of Jesus' identity (9:9) comes between Jesus' commissioning of the 12 and the miracle of Jesus' feeding of the 5000. This is not coincidental. What do you think this statement means: *Christology* [our understanding of Christ] *and mission are two sides of the same coin.*

8) Jesus' feeding of the 5000 is the only one of his miracles reported in all four Gospels, which suggests something about its importance. But as much as this story may be about the miracle of Jesus feeding so many with so little, it is also a story about the Kingdom.

- a) What does the feeding of 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish say about the Kingdom?
- b) How are Jesus' words in 9:13 a statement about compassion and discipleship?
- c) It is often pointed out that Jesus' actions in feeding the 5000 reflect the actions of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving in the sacrament of communion. If this is so, what does it mean?

9) Luke 9:18-27 recounts a turning point in Jesus' earthly ministry; indeed, the case can be made it is *the* turning point. After chapters of incident upon incident dealing with the question of Jesus' identity—is he the Messiah and what kind of Messiah is he?—Jesus himself provides the answer. In the process, he articulates in starkly simple terms how his identity as the Messiah defines what it will mean to follow him.

- a) Note how Jesus immediately defines his Messiahship in terms of suffering (9:22). This is a critical point to our understanding of Jesus. Why?
- b) What implications are there for the church of Jesus' emphasis on suffering?
- c) Note the beginning of verse 9:23. Jesus, prior to talking about what it will mean to follow him, shifts his attention from just the disciples to all who are present—and, by extension, to you and me. Accordingly, read verses 23-25, then reflect on the following statements:

Jesus is on the way to the cross, not a throne, and those who follow him must be ready to follow him on this road of obedience to God's redemptive will and sacrifice for the salvation of others.

When we preach a crucified Christ, the only authentic response is for you to give up all other pursuits that might compromise your commitment and devote yourself entirely to the fulfillment of the Kingdom tasks for which Jesus gave up his own life. The nature of our discipleship always reflects our understanding of Jesus' lordship.

There are only two impulses in life: to acquire, take, hoard, own, and protect; or to give and to serve. The first assumes each of us can be the Lord of our own lives and that our security and fulfillment depend on our ability to provide for ourselves. The other confesses the sovereignty of God and devotes life to the fulfillment of God's redemptive will in delivering and empowering others, establishing justice and peace, tearing down barriers, reconciling persons, and creating communities.

- d) Read 9:26, then consider this: Who we say Jesus is now, through our words and actions, determines what Jesus will say of us in the future.

10) Much has been written (and preached) about the Transfiguration (9:28-36) and what it meant to Peter, James, and John in particular and, by extension, to the rest of Jesus' disciples and followers in general. It's also the case that this one event—perhaps more than any other recorded in the Gospels—sums up the totality of who and what Jesus is: as you read it, note the echoes of his baptism, predictions of his passion, his fulfillment of the Law and prophets, his death and resurrection, and his ascension and future return. But in terms of what the Transfiguration means to us as Jesus followers today, perhaps its most important element is the words spoken by God: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” Clearly, these words are intended not just for Peter, James, and John and the other disciples but for all people for all times. They are perhaps the clearest declaration in all Scripture of the Lordship of Christ and the need to follow him. As such, they are words that once again confront us with what it means to proclaim that Lordship in our own lives. So, a basic yet crucial question: what does it mean in your life to proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord? It might help to recall your thinking about the second of the three statements in 9c above.

11) 9:37-43 provide one of the rare examples of “cranky Jesus.” How do you account for Jesus' reaction in 9:41? And why were the same disciples who'd been able to heal people when sent out previously (9:1-6) unable to heal this boy? It might be instructive to consider these questions in light of verses 9:44-45.

12) 9:46-48 can, in fact, be seen as an extension of 9:37-45. The disciples are still struggling with their understanding of Jesus' identity. The crux of the struggle is that the kind of Messiah Jesus is revealing himself to be is so contrary to the kind of Messiah Jews of Jesus' time had ever been taught to expect. It's probably safe to say that they desperately wanted to believe Jesus was the Messiah but he kept doing and saying things that made belief difficult, particularly when changing their understanding of what it meant to be the Messiah required changing their understanding of what it meant to be a follower of that Messiah. Change in how they understood, in other words, required change in how they lived. This explains the event narrated in 9:46-48. Jesus has been talking all this time about the Kingdom, but the disciples are arguing who among themselves is the greatest. How do Jesus' words in 9:48 address what the disciples are doing? How might this apply to us?

13) Read 9:49-50—carefully. Then consider the following:

- a) Compare 9:49 with 9:40. What do you conclude (other than the obvious)?
- b) Ultimately, perhaps, the issue here is who's actually doing the work of the Kingdom. What does this have to say to the church?