

UP IN OUT

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 January 2021

Preacher: Anthony Parrott

[0 : 0 0] Hi Table Church, my name is Anthony Parrott and I have the honor of serving as the lead pastor here at the Table Church. And we are in week two of a study through the book of Luke, the gospel of Luke, and the life of Jesus.

And last week we took a look at how Jesus brings healing into the world and how Jesus calls his first disciples and Jesus goes to Peter and calls him to be part of something larger than himself.

And that wherever Jesus goes, Jesus is always doing that work of invitation and challenge, of inviting people into a new kind of life, bringing healing into the world. And we're continuing that story today in the gospel of Luke chapter 6.

And let's just jump right in. It says this, it says, I love this verse because it shows us that Jesus, who is God in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity, Christ, Jesus spends a night praying to God.

And this is actually a motif that you can follow throughout the four gospels of how often Jesus gets away by himself to pray, to be with God. Jesus takes a nap in a boat.

[1 : 2 5] Jesus goes off to solitary, lonely places, gets away from the crowd, gets away from people to pray and to be with God. And I just think that if even Jesus needs to do this, maybe we could take a lesson.

Let's keep going. Jesus goes out to a mountainside. He spends a night praying to God. Verse 13, When morning came, Jesus calls his disciples to him and chose 12 of them, whom he also designated as apostles.

So Jesus has a lot of disciples. I think sometimes we can imagine that Jesus has just the 12 following him around, the 12 that we're about to be introduced to, James and John and Andrew and Bartholomew and that whole list.

But as a matter of fact, there's a whole bunch of people that are following Jesus, the rabbi Jesus and his itinerant ministry around Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem.

And this group of disciples who are imitating the way, the words, the life of Jesus includes not just the 12 men that were about to be introduced here, but it includes families and children and women.

[2 : 3 4] We're told later on in the book of Luke that it's actually a group of women who are financially supporting Jesus that while the men have left their jobs and are going around bringing healing and teaching into the world, the women are the one who are financially supporting this ministry.

We're told multiple times in the story of Jesus where Jesus will grab a kid and use that kid as an example of saying you should be like children in order to be part of God's kingdom here on earth means that there are children and families who are with Jesus.

There are the crowds, yes, the hundreds and thousands of people who are experiencing, listening to what Jesus has to say. But there's also a group of 70 around that would probably be the disciples and their families.

When we imagine, say, for instance, the Last Supper, the week of Jesus's death. Again, we have like the Leonardo da Vinci picture of Jesus with 12 others and that's it.

But as a matter of fact, it's a big room. It wouldn't be just a group of men. There would be men and women and children. It would be a big ruckus party of Jesus in this Last Supper.

[3 : 43] So there's the crowds, the hundreds, the thousands. There's a big extended family of about 70. And then of those disciples, Jesus right now is about to designate 12 as apostles.

An apostle is a Greek word. It simply means a sense one. Before Jesus's time in the early church, it was just a word for any sort of messenger of a king or an important person.

And Jesus, who we'll see in the gospel is claiming that he is the king of God's kingdom, is now designating 12 folks as sent ones to go tell this gospel, this good news, that something is happening in the person of Jesus.

And eventually, as we track that story into the book of Acts, just Luke part 2, we see that the apostles are extended beyond just these 12. But we're told in the book of Romans that there is an apostle named Junia.

We're told about Paul, who's a sent one. We're told about lots of apostles. But these are the first 12. Simon, whom he called Peter, this is verse 14, and his brother Andrew.

[4 : 55] And then James and John, who are brothers. Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas. James, the son of Alphaeus. Simon, who's called the Zealot. James, the son of John. Judas Iscariot, who becomes a traitor.

And this group of 12 is a remarkable group because you've got fishermen and you've got tax collectors, the people who take taxes from the fishermen.

You've got Simon the Zealot, who the Zealots were a group of folks who wanted to overthrow the Roman government. And Judas Iscariot.

Iscariot comes with the word Sycharite, the dagger men, who also wanted to violently overthrow the empire. So you've got the empire folks like Levi Matthew, a tax collector, who is taking money for the empire.

And then Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who wants to violently overthrow the empire, mixed up with the fishermen like Simon and Andrew and James and John, who just want to make a living and not get their taxes taken away from them.

[5 : 55] And Jesus calls all of these people his sent ones and gets them to spend a few years with Jesus. Then verse 17. Then Jesus went down with them, so these apostles, these sent ones, his disciples, and stood on a level place.

And a large crowd of Jesus' disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea and Jerusalem, from the coastal region, around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So as we look at this passage, I see three important dimensions of Jesus' life and of the Christian faith that we ought to reflect on and think about.

The first dimension, we can call this, this will be on your screen, the up dimension. The idea that Jesus goes under a mountainside to pray and spends the night asking, talking to God.

God. And this is the, the up dimension is the part of our relationship with God, of knowing who God is, knowing God's character, knowing what God is like.

[7 : 14] And this up dimension, we can call it worship. We can call it formation. We can call it theology. We can call it a personal relationship with Jesus. But it's that part of our lives, that part of our lives with God, that is him and us, the divine and the human making a relationship together.

So there's the up dimension. Then there is the in dimension. We see in verse 13, when morning came, Jesus called his disciples to him and designated them apostles, Jesus's mission to, Jesus puts this in lots of different ways, to seek and to save the lost, to not heal the healthy, but to heal the sick, to gather sinners to himself and eat and dine with them.

Jesus's mission to save the world is not one that he is going to accomplish by himself, which this is a radical idea. Remember, the gospels claim, Christians claim that Jesus is God in the flesh and God's mission to save the world, God in the person of Jesus refuses to do alone.

Jesus insists to do it in the context of community. So this in dimension is the communal, the friendship, the fellowship, the idea of doing it with other like-minded folks.

So there's the up dimension, our relationship with God. There's the in dimension, our relationship with other believers, other Christians, other people who have that relationship with God. And then it doesn't stop there.

[8 : 51] And this is important to remember that there is a third dimension, and that is the out. So Jesus goes down with them, stands on a level place. A large crowd gathered there, and they came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases.

Jesus' relationship with God isn't good enough by itself. Jesus brings other people into it with the in dimension, with his disciples and apostles, to those that Jesus says imitate me.

But that in and of itself is not enough. There is the up and there is the end, but there is also the out, the sense of mission, the sense of purpose, the fact that Christians don't exist for the sake of themselves.

Believers of Jesus exist for the sake of the world, for the sake of others, to bring healing and reconciliation and redemption and justice into God's creation.

This is the mission. And so there is this three-dimensional aspect of our relationship with God, with people, with those who don't yet know the healing touch of God.

[10 : 05] Now, in my experience, there tends to be churches and individuals who do okay with two of the three, but miss out on one.

So, for instance, you can have a church that does great at up and at in. Churches that have a big emphasis on like worship and teaching and small groups and community and theology, but they don't have a sense of mission or purpose.

They don't think outside of their own four walls. They don't think outside of themselves. They're allergic to phrases like social justice. They don't really have a sense of mission. They don't really know what's going on in their neighborhoods.

They're great at the worship and the teaching and the community and the small groups, but everything else, it's kind of not worth our time or energy. We're just not great at it. To have a gross stereotype, okay, this can be a form of some evangelical churches, where you've got the lights and the smoke machine and the great music and the great sense of community, but there's no real sense of anything outside of that.

Personally, this can look like having a great devotional life, having friends in the church and you're participating in a small group and you look really, really busy in your spiritual life, but you never actually get to know anybody outside of your little Christian bubble.

[11 : 28] You don't exist for this something that outside of yourself, you live and swim and breathe in church life and everything else is kind of abandoned.

Then there can be churches and people who do great at the up and the out. So these are churches that have a great sense of orthodoxy and history and they can say lots of true things about God and they might have lots of outreach and social justice programs and compassion initiatives, but they're insular.

It's hard to join and to feel a part of them. They don't really develop a sense of community. They can do, maybe they even do like big events and they have a massive response, but yet you get lost in the crowd.

You're just one part of the machine, a cog. This can be certain kind of mainline churches, churches that have big, beautiful orthodoxy and big social justice outreach programs.

And even some mega churches can be like this, but they don't do anything to develop community and spiritual friendship and fellowship. Personally, this can look like somebody who is really into the Bible and worship and even serving others.

[12 : 47] But when it comes to developing friends and being accountable to other believers and being part of a small group or a dinner party or something like that, they're like, ah, that's not for me.

I'd rather do this on my own. And then finally, you can have churches and individuals who are great at the out and the in. At a church level, this can look like a church that's great at outreach and compassion and justice and mission.

They can do a great job of helping people feel connected and involved and part of a community, but no one's entirely sure what they believe. There's a hesitancy to state those beliefs too clearly, lest anybody feel like they're left out or offended.

Personally, this can look like a very and busy, active, spiritual life, but in terms of building relationship with God, Christ, the Spirit, God itself, God himself, well, I'll leave that for another time.

It's all about the activity that I do, but in terms of a relationship with the divine, who am I to possibly do that? So before we go much further, let's stop and pause for a second and consider if you had to rank the table church in these three dimensions of up, in, and out, how do you think we're doing?

[14 : 14] And if you had to assess yourself, how are you doing in these three dimensions of up, in, and out? How do you think we're doing? So if you're watching this live Sunday morning, head into the chat, and let's talk about this for like three minutes or so and talk about how we're doing.

There's also, you can do this now if you're watching live or if you're watching later, a Google form where you can just simply put a scale of one to five, one being not so great, five being pretty good, how we're doing in each of those three dimensions, both the church as, you know, a whole group of people and in yourself individually.

So let's stop, pause for a moment, and consider that. Welcome back.

And thanks for the conversation and for filling out that little assessment. I'll report back next week. There's, I don't have a whole lot more to say this week, and I struggle ending the sermon with a bunch of like shoulds and oughts.

Well, we should be better at this. We ought to be better at that. Because that can often just lead to like a vicious cycle of like shame or guilt that doesn't really get us anywhere. But I do wonder if there are some I will or we will statements that we could make as we think about our own personal lives, our spiritual lives, and as we think about the life of our church, which, you know, obviously has been stymied by a global pandemic, and we can't meet physically together regularly, and a lot of volunteering and serving opportunities have been, you know, put on pause for a while.

[15 : 55] But as we think about all of this, I wonder if there are some I will statements that we could make. I wonder if we begin to be honest with ourselves of, yeah, I rate myself as having this great spiritual life, but in fact, it's only one or two dimensional.

I wonder if we can have that sort of honesty so it can propel us towards growth, so it can propel us towards a real sense of direction and movement. As a church and as the pastor of the Table Church, I want us to be a three-dimensional church.

I want us to look at the life of Jesus and see how Jesus had a relationship with God, had a relationship with people, and did all of that for the sake of the world, for the sake of others.

I wonder if we can look at this life and pattern our church and our own lives after it. If we can be a church that can be about spiritual formation and worship and getting to know who God is, God's character through scripture and study and prayer and singing and laments and all of that.

I wonder if we can be a church that focuses on friendship. There's lots of churchy words for it, fellowship and community and all of those things, but what it comes down to is, can we be friends with one another and can we put in the time and the effort and the energy to invest in friendship?

[17 : 19] Friendship doesn't happen accidentally. It may be used to when we were all in school and we couldn't help but bump into each other, but now that we're out in the world and friendship can't only be based off of convenience, it has to take investment and energy and effort.

Can we be that kind of church and those kinds of people? And can we be a church that's known for justice, that we don't exist solely for the sake of ourselves, we don't exist solely that we can have a whole bunch of books and know a whole bunch of things about God, and we don't exist solely that we can just be friends with people who look and think and act and speak like us, we do it for the sake of the world, for the sake of reconciliation, for the sake of justice rolling down like a river, for a place where justice can make its home, which is also going to take energy and effort and investment.

And if we let any one of those three dimensions fall, if we try to do justice but on our own, without God, without friends, we'll get exhausted. If we try to do community and friendship with no sense of doing it for a reason or doing it alongside the Holy Spirit, we will become insular and we will become just alone in our friendship and no one will want to join us because we're so insular and self-obsessed.

And if we only focus on our relationship with God and our personal relationship with Jesus, then we will become blind to either the possibility of knowing other people or doing something to make the world more beautiful and just.

These three must interlock and work together for it to work, which means we've got work to do as a church. That was part of our conversation of recognizing this is a three-dimensional effort that we have got to put our heart and soul and mind and strength into.

[18 : 59] So friends, I hope that you will join me in being honest with ourselves, with each other, so that we can then make a path forward in becoming a three-dimensional kingdom-bringing community and church of Jesus Christ.

Would you pray with me? Father, Son, and Spirit, Triune God, I thank you that you are a divine community inviting us to join you in that divine dance.

and that as you are shaping and forming us as a church, as individuals, and as a community, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, I ask and pray that you would give us a sense of awareness and honesty for truth and a desire to not be content or stagnant in where we are, but rather have a passion to be driven forward, to know that there is more and that we can seek you in order to make a difference in this world, in order to know you and who you are, in order to know all the ways that you have revealed yourself and those around us.

So help us, God, to be a three-dimensional church, that the table church may be the kind of place that's not satisfied with one- or two-dimensional faith, but rather that we would pursue a three-dimensional way of loving you, loving each other, and loving your creation.

We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.