



Discipleship

Ideas for the Iowa District West

Introduction

The following “Discipleship Ideas” from the readings are not intended for any other purpose than to provide ideas of application from each reading that may be included in the taught and preached Word for this particular Sunday to help teach a life of discipleship. L.C.M.S. pastors are gifted at preaching Law and Gospel, but often lack in the matter of personal applications to the Word. This tool is for no other reason than to offer some seeds of thought to do that.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT - SERIES C

December 6, 2015

From C.P.H. About the Cover: Most all of us enjoy the variety of fruits that the Lord allows to grow and ripen each year. Some are green, some red, some orange, some yellow, but all are from the Lord’s hand and are for our good and enjoyment. It’s the same with the fruits of repentance. As God’s people, we live lives of repentance; therefore, we bear wholesome fruits in keeping with that repentance

First Reading; Malachi 3:1–7b

¹“Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁵“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them.

Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'

1st Reading Discipleship Notes: Through Malachi God lays out His advent promise of the prophet, John the Baptist as well as the advent promise of the Messiah whose way John would prepare. He also promised purification or salvation to those of faith and eternal judgement of consumption in hell for those of unbelief. Thus He calls the reader of these words to repentance and faith. The application of this text is therefore just that, a call to repentance and faith. Now in the setting of the Christian congregation, this might seem unnecessary. But it can become rote and insincere. It is solely by God's grace that we can live a true life of continuous repentance and faith which is also something easily translated to others as a life which is in fellowship with God.

Epistle Reading Philippians 1:2–11

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Epistle Discipleship Notes: Paul does something in this reading that is so important for God's people to do often and that is to thank God for one another and to let those people know that you do so. There was a partnership in the Gospel that Paul had with the Philippians. Even though their love needed to grow and was not yet what it could be, there was still a partnership in the Gospel they shared with Paul. How often our partnership is hindered because we look down on others who aren't quite where we are in the life of faith. But Paul was eager and willing to pray for that increase of faith and knowledge and discernment for these people. Herein lies the application of the text. By the grace of God we can encourage one another in the faith and we can pray for one another to grow in love, in knowledge and in discernment. In doing so, God's kingdom work is encouraged, Christ's Church on earth is more strongly united and God's people are drawn together in common purpose which is to bring the knowledge of the Gospel to people everywhere.

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-14

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and

Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,

⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

⁷He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

Gospel Discipleship Notes: At first glance into this text we might wonder if John the Baptist was much of a theologian. When the crowds asked him what they must do, he gave them marching orders pertaining to their particular sins in life. Yet that was not a recipe for salvation, rather it is a response to the Gospel which comes to us as we live lives of repentance and faith. The application of this text lies in the fact that as repentant believers, we too have appropriate responses to our particular station in life as to how we ought to live. By God's grace in the forgiveness of sins and the gift of God's salvation, we can live as we ought. Here is where the example of John in identifying specific life issues can be identified as to how a parent, a child, a husband or wife, an employee or employer might see the appropriateness of their lifestyle as a Christian can be properly witnessed in what they do and how they do it.

Adult/High School Youth Discipleship Bible Study Outline

Read Malachi 3:1–7b

¹“Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁵“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’

1. Who is meant by “my messenger and he will prepare the way before me” in the first verse of this reading?
2. How is the Lord like a refiner or a fuller who purifies and refine the sinner?
3. What does it mean to “bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD” in this reading?
4. What does it mean that God would “be a swift witness against” those who failed to fear Him?
5. What does it mean to “return” to God and how is that done?
6. What application from this reading might you make for your life?

Read Philippians 1:2–11

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be

pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

7. How do you think the Philippians felt upon hearing that Paul thanked God for them and that his prayers were filled with joy because of them? Have you ever let someone know this sort of thing?
8. What is meant by a “partnership in the Gospel” and how is this something shared in the Church today?
9. What accompanied the common element of sharing in the grace of God with Paul and how does that show itself in the Church today?
10. What relationship does love abounding have to do with knowledge and discernment abounding as well?
11. How might this reading encourage us to live more serious lives of discipleship with regard to our faith?

READ: Luke 3:1-14

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,

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⁷He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” ¹¹And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” ¹³And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

12. Why was it important that God inspired Luke to identify the particular year that the Word of the Lord came to John?

13. How was John the fulfillment of verse 5?
14. How were all those in the crowds a “brood of vipers”?
15. What was meant by their claim to Abraham and how is that shown in the modern age?
16. Why were the people asking questions about “what to do”?
17. What application of this Gospel reading will you apply to your life as a result of hearing it today?

Adult/High School Youth Discipleship Bible Study Outline (Leader's Guide)

Read Malachi 3:1–7b

¹"Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁵"Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

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1. Who is meant by "my messenger and he will prepare the way before me" in the first verse of this reading?

This was a prophecy pointing to John the Baptist.

2. How is the Lord like a refiner or a fuller who purifies and refine the sinner?

A refiner and fuller make things pure and clean. The Lord does this by giving us the forgiveness of sins.

3. What does it mean to "bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD" in this reading?

It means to bring offers in a matter of faith and to bring them in joy rather than out of obligation and resentment for having to do so. Righteousness comes to us by grace through faith.

4. What does it mean that God would "be a swift witness against" those who failed to fear Him?

This is a reference to God's judgement on those who fail to believe and who rebel against God.

5. What does it mean to "return" to God and how is that done?

This is a call to repentance.

6. What application from this reading might you make for your life?

Read: Philippians 1:2–11

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

7. How do you think the Philippians felt upon hearing that Paul thanked God for them and that his prayers were filled with joy because of them? Have you ever let someone know this sort of thing?

These are questions of personal observation – let the participants talk.

8. What is meant by a “partnership in the Gospel” and how is this something shared in the Church today?

This reflects the fact that one needs the other for the work of the Gospel. In the Church today it is something that is carried out in our common mission commitments we share in the church body as well as the common work shared through such things as LWML or various mission societies, etc.

9. What accompanied the common element of sharing in the grace of God with Paul and how does that show itself in the Church today?

The defense and confirmation of the Gospel accompanied the participation in the grace of God. Answers will vary about how it is shown in the Church today.

10. What relationship does love abounding have to do with knowledge and discernment abounding as well?

When Christ’s love abounds in our hearts, we have a natural desire to grow in spiritual knowledge and discernment as well. They are all part of our growth as disciples of Christ.

11. How might this reading encourage us to live more serious lives of discipleship with regard to our faith?

READ: Luke 3:1-14

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12. Why was it important that God inspired Luke to identify the particular year that the Word of the Lord came to John?

God inspired Luke with the very words he was to write, but God also used the profession and personality of Luke in doing so. Luke was a physician and extremely meticulous about things and that was shown in his writing. In this case it identified the very time when John began his ministry and also identified the time at which the way was being prepared for the Savior to begin his own public ministry.

13. How was John the fulfillment of verse 5?

Before a king would travel throughout his kingdom, the roads would have to be prepared. They would send out those who would clear the rocks and make the road ready before the king came. In this sense, John filled the valleys, lowered the hills, etc. making the matter of spiritual awareness ready for Christ's arrival and His Kingdom to come among the people.

14. How were all those in the crowds a "brood of vipers"?

A brood of vipers was not only poisonous to others, but also to themselves. Sin had infected mankind in like manner. Not only is our sin harmful to others, but certainly to ourselves and it only infects the culture around us more and more to the point of becoming self-destructive like a brood of vipers.

15. What was meant by their claim to Abraham and how is that shown in the modern age?

The Hebrew people felt as though because they were the chosen nation of promise as descendants of Abraham, they also were somehow insured of God's favor. When we as Lutherans somehow claim such insurance of salvation simply because we are good Lutherans, we are just like them. The real test of salvation rests in the righteousness we are given by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and the gift of forgiveness and salvation that comes as a result of a repentant life in Jesus Christ.

16. Why were the people asking questions about "what to do"?

After coming to repentance and faith, it is natural that we should want to respond to God's grace appropriately. While Luther would say, "for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey" God, John took it a step further and called them specifically to live a life worthy of their calling and their repentance in carrying out godliness in their own lives.

17. What application of this Gospel reading will you apply to your life as a result of hearing it today?

Discipleship Bulletin Blurb

Preparing the way for the coming of Christ resounds in the readings appointed for today. That preparation involves a call to repentance and as response to God's mercy in living a life worthy of repentance. As modern day disciples of the Living Lord Jesus, our continued repentance and confidence in the Lord's mercy remains the highest priority of our lives being prepared for the second coming of the Lord, but our lives should also reflect a life worthy of the calling we have as redeemed in Christ.

Discipleship Prayer Thought

O Lord, grant us Your grace to find ourselves coming before you having prepared our hearts with true repentance and faith. Fill us with Your mercy to not only receive Your forgiveness but then also to respond to Your mercy by living lives that are worthy of repentance, not falling back into a life of sin and disgrace, but living a life that reflects Your grace and mercy to others. Fill us with faith and courage to make known Your love and mercy to people everywhere. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**