

The Gospel Is...Popular: Week 1

Today we began the series, "The Gospel Is". I love that we will wrestle with the good news of Christ in some pretty significant ways during this time. Our desire is that the messages will sink deeper into your everyday life and that you will reflect daily on their implication. To help you, each Sunday I will post a new study on our website to give you more purposeful time around the message.

The Studies

...will all come from Luke 14, a chapter that teaches us a ton about the Gospel. Be aware that the studies are not written for the specific sermon for that week but written for the sermon topic. Although, at the end of the study, there are questions that will help you implement the specific sermon more purposefully.

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Pour a Cup: This is a personal story from my life that is told just to help you smell the aroma, get the taste buds going, to get you ready for the topic at hand. It's a story to build anticipation, eagerness to taste, to get your thoughts wandering and to jumpstart the heart.



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Well, let's get started! Feel free to make yourself a real cup of coffee, find a quiet place to settle in for a few minutes, and open your Bible to Luke 14. Looking forward to having coffee with you these next weeks!

Your Pastor in the journey,

Mitch White

The Gospel Is...Popular: Week 1

Sermon Study for the week of February 10

Pour a cup...



I consider myself a pretty good student of our culture. I understand more and more though, that I mostly enjoy being a student of people. I find myself often in coffee shops, the mall, and traffic watching people and how they walk, talk, dress, react, and engage others.

In fact, on my sabbatical this summer there were various Sundays I didn't attend a church at all. Yes, I admit it. Instead, I went to Starbucks in Birkdale Village, Lowe's, and even the grocery store. I just wanted to see what people do on Sunday mornings when all of us are at church. Who were these people? Were they all just staying in bed? How really different are they?

Well, I found out they are normal, everyday people. They are people just like us. Yea, I know, surprising isn't it. Did I expect to find something different? Not really. But the truth is that when I think about someone not being in church on Sunday mornings, something stirs in me immediately.

I remember riding through our neighborhood one Sunday and seeing a little girl and her friend riding bikes... when they should've been in church! And I noticed the first thought that jumped into my head was, *"those kids have really bad parents."* Rightly or wrongly, this was the first impression that jumped to the surface. I automatically put them in a "bad person" category.

I then arrived at Lowe's and it all hit the surface again: *"What's wrong with these people? Are their lives so busy that they can't take an hour and a half out of their week just to go to church? Can't all these home projects wait just an hour and a half? Jeepers, Lowe's is even crowded on Sunday mornings (so much for thinking they all stay in bed). Hey, maybe, just maybe, all of these people are actually pastors at other churches and they are on sabbatical too!"*

I didn't know any of these people. I didn't know any of their stories or any of the reasons they were not in church; yet I automatically lumped them into a category. Yes, I wished my first impression had been, "What's their story? What's life been like for them? Do they have any interest in God? What right thinking do they have about God? What wrong thinking do they have about God and where did that thinking come from?"

No, instead, I put them at distance from myself and from the good news of Christ. So, right there in my neighborhood, in my local Lowe's, I made two cultures: me and them. I was for God and they weren't... so I assumed.



Cream and Sugar...

Open your Bible to Luke 14:1-6. Simply ask God to open your heart to be changed by the time you will spend in these words from Him. Take and read through the passage without analyzing it, just getting the picture. Now, read it a second time, only this time, pay a little more attention to detail you might have missed.

Answer the following questions to help you get all the details of the passage in your thoughts:

What day was it and where do we find Jesus-location; situation; who else was with him?

What about the Pharisees? Look at the situation from their angle; who is with them and what are they watching and seeing?

A big thing to notice in this passage is who is talking? Who is acting? Who doesn't talk? Who doesn't move?



Stir it Up...

You now have the details of the passage in your head. Let's think about the passage a bit more, reflecting on some of the events. No right or wrong answers here—just reflection.

The 4th Commandment (Exodus 20:8) tells us that no work is to be done on the Sabbath and the Pharisees were the religious leaders who helped to enforce this law. But, the Pharisees don't bring up the subject this time. The man with leprosy doesn't even ask Jesus to heal him. Yet, Jesus does both.

Why do you think Jesus brought up the challenge and healed the man?

Frequently we see the Pharisees challenging Jesus about working on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-14; Mark 3:2; John 9:13-16). This is one of the only instances you find them quiet.

Why do you think they say nothing here? How is this situation different from the other passages in which they go after him?

Think about Jesus' question to the Pharisees in verse 5.

How would you answer this rhetorical question? What is the point Jesus was trying to make to the Pharisees?



Take a Sip...

Ok, time to pick that cup of coffee up and get it into our own lives.

In this passage, you've noticed that Jesus was with a "prominent" group of leaders in the culture—a huge opportunity to make a statement. But more importantly, he was with a group of people who were watching him carefully; seeing how he'd interact with them.

What have been situations that you know your behavior and actions were being watched and you were really grateful for what they saw? How about an instance when you were really sad about what they saw?

This week's sermon was about the good news of Christ engaging our culture and not separating from it. Jesus went above and beyond to engage his culture. He could have done a lot of things that day: just had a peaceful dinner; sided with the Pharisees and talked poorly about the man with dropsy; sided with the man with dropsy and just healed him and never said a word to the Pharisees. But instead of dividing the house, he engaged all parties: healing one physically and challenging bad thinking of the others. It was not him versus them. It was him for them.

What were a couple of points in the sermon this week that you saw to be true in the story you read today about Jesus? What is unsettling in your own heart about those points, if anything?

In my opening story, I shared about a time I watched my surroundings and then separated myself without ever considering how to engage it.

As a follower of Christ, where are a couple of places you know you will be today that have a high chance of people watching you? Places you will have an opportunity to engage or separate? Maybe its work, the grocery store, a restaurant, or your child's school, etc...

When you are normally in these places, what are your thoughts about the other people that are there? Any thoughts at all? Concerns for them? Dread to be around them? Couldn't care either way?

Think creatively for a moment about a way you can engage your environment, not separate from it. How could you go over and beyond to engage the people you will be around today?

To close your time, sit quietly for a couple of minutes and allow the warmth and taste of the coffee to settle in. Just be still.

Now, close with a simple prayer asking the Lord to remind you, as you go through the day, of ways to bring the good news of Jesus into your cultural environments.

The Gospel Is...Sacrifice: Week 2

I hope you enjoyed last week's launch into "The Gospel Is" series. My desire is that the messages will sink deeper into your everyday life and that you will reflect daily on their implication. To help you, each Sunday I will post a new study on our website to give you more purposeful time around the message. Below is how the studies will work and page 2 begins this weeks series. Enjoy your cup of coffee!

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Your Pastor in the journey,

Mitch White

The Gospel Is...Sacrifice: Week 2

Sermon Study for the week of February 17, 2008

Pour a cup...



My favorite movie of all time is "Glory". If you haven't seen it, rent it! If you have a weak stomach for violence, a couple of scenes may push your dinner eject button but it stars Matthew Broderick, Denzel Washington and Morgan Freeman. So, you know it's good! In fact, I love it so much, there is a photo hanging on my wall of the very last scene in the movie.

Based on a true story, the movie is centered on Col. Robert Shaw, leader of the first black regiment to fight for the North in the Civil War. It's a story of the tension between longing for something and discovering what you are willing to sacrifice in order to get it. For the black regiment, they longed for freedom and learned it cost more than they realized as they faced the realities of war. For Col. Shaw, he longed to be a good leader, to not let people down. He realized it would cost him relationships with the regiment, his friends, and his family. He also learned that it would cost him his life.

I keep the picture of the last scene in my office because it shows all the men that Shaw trained, invested in, devoted time and energy to, and sacrificed for. I'm struck by it because Shaw is not in the picture. All that is left is the men that he sacrificed for, doing the very thing that he trained them to do, moving on without him, fighting for what they longed for, a picture of "Glory".

It's a beautiful picture for me to think about. It's the picture I long to have of my own life. It's my philosophy of ministry. It's what I long for my life to look like in the end. It even gives me great amounts of excitement just writing about it. I love that I long for it. It seems right. It feels right.

But the reality is that I am learning the cost of getting it. And that is the tension for me. Am I willing to go through what it takes to get it? Am I willing to sacrifice name, reputation, and life to get it? Am I willing to pay the price?

But then there is the new tension that asking these questions brings: **Is it true sacrifice when you know that what you are giving up is getting you what you really want?** Is it really sacrifice when I am willing to give up energy, time, comfort, etc... when I know in the end, my life will be this portrait on my wall? Is it really sacrifice when I align my life in such a manner that ultimately I'm still just after what I want-that picture on the wall?

Or, is the real sacrifice my willingness to give up the picture on the wall?

So, here lies my new tension: what is more important to me than the picture on the wall? Is there anything more important than the picture on the wall? Am I willing to sacrifice my life being that picture?



Cream and Sugar...

Open your Bible to Luke 14:7-11. Simply ask God to open your heart to be changed by the time you will spend in these words from Him. Take and read through the passage without analyzing it, just getting the picture. Now, read it a second time, only this time, pay a little more attention to detail you might have missed.

Answer the following questions to help you get all the details of the passage in your thoughts:

Last week we read a section in which people are watching Jesus carefully. We now see the tables turned and he is watching them. What does he notice?

A parable is a story that is told in order to teach a lesson. Here, the story is in verses 8-10 and the lesson is verse 11. What happens to the man that appoints himself the seat of honor at the wedding feast?

What is the alternate plan that is given in the story and the outcome?

Using your own words, what would you say the bottom line lesson is that Jesus is teaching?



Stir it Up...

You now have the details of the passage in your head. Let's think about the passage a bit more, reflecting on some of the events. No right or wrong answers here-just reflection.

Jesus is watching this group of people. He is at the home of a prominent Pharisee which means that there are many others there with high status.

As he watches their actions, he learns about their hearts. How would you describe the heart condition of those he is watching?

If you left off verse 11 and just read the parable, what is the heart behind going and taking the seat of honor at the feast? What is the heart behind taking the lowest place? Is there any difference?

Verse 11 is a great principle to live by. When Jesus speaks it, do you think he is saying this is true in every situation and will be true every single time? Do you think he is just giving us a "nicer" strategy for how to ultimately get what we want?



Take a Sip...

Ok, time to pick that cup of coffee up and get it into our own lives.

For many of us, it's hard to read this passage and see it as a lesson in humbleness. "Am I really being humble if I'm just lowering myself in order to be lifted up?" Or, "Am I just putting on a façade and my heart is no different?"

Name a time in which you "humbled" yourself or "sacrificed" something completely because you knew that eventually this would give you the advantage over everyone?

Like the story I shared in the beginning, there is a real tension sometimes to know if I am really sacrificing, or if I'm really being humbled. Am I using sacrifice and/or humbleness to just get what I want?

Name a time in which you know you really chose to humble yourself, or chose truly to sacrifice something without any false motive. What is the difference between this time and the time you wrote about in the previous question?

What is your "picture on the wall"? Would you be willing to sacrifice it? If so, what do you imagine that looking like?

In this morning's sermon, we talked about Sacrifice. In what ways do the points from the sermon align with the passage you just read? What do each make you wrestle with?

What are situations you know you will be in this week that you can purposely take a "lower place"? How do you think that will go over?

What are situations you will be in this week that you know if you take the lower seat it will cost you to sacrifice something? What will you sacrifice? Why would it be worth sacrificing even if you don't know how or if you will be lifted up?

To close your time, sit quietly for a couple of minutes and allow the warmth and taste of the coffee to settle in. Just be still.

Now, close with a simple prayer asking the Lord to remind you, as you go through the day, to have a humbled and sacrificial heart. Ask him to define what it means to be humble, to sacrifice.

The Gospel Is...Poor: Week 3

Hope you are enjoying the studies. I pray you are finding yourself thinking about the Sunday sermons more often during the week and wrestling with the messages. Most importantly, I pray you are seeing your life being affected by simply thinking about the good news of Jesus (the Gospel) daily. To continue to help you, each Sunday I will post a new study on our website to give you more purposeful time around the message. Below is how the studies will work and page 2 begins this weeks series. Enjoy your cup of coffee!

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Your Pastor in the journey,
Mitch White

The Gospel Is...Poor: Week 3

Sermon Study for the week of February 24, 2008

Pour a cup...



Mr. Hamilton was 67 and a man that loved our family when we were just starting in full-time ministry. Our son Caleb was two and we had one car with no ability to purchase another. Mr. Hamilton called one day to say that he had been praying and wanted to give us a car and pay for all tags, transfer fees, everything. My response, "You don't have to do that." My thoughts, "I really hope you will do that!" Mr. Hamilton's response, "I know I don't HAVE to do it. I want to do it! That's why it's a gift!" Thank you for reminding Mr. Hamilton.

While I deeply wanted the car for our family, the gift made me feel extremely awkward. For a couple of days, my soul raced, "How could I get the car and yet leave behind the feeling that I now owe him? How could I repay him? I can't give him money but maybe I can pay him back in another way? Think! Think of something! Make it so we are even. It's too hard to just receive and not be able to repay."

Think about this: When was the last time you gave a gift or received a gift and one of the following was not said: "You didn't have to get me anything." "You shouldn't have." "Now I feel guilty because I didn't get you anything." "How much do I owe you for it?" "Ok, what do you want?"

Better yet, can you remember a time you gave something completely free of the thinking, "I have to get them something" or "they'll never forgive me if I don't get them something" or "maybe they will give me something too?"

Why is it so hard to give without a deep down feeling that you have to or a hope that maybe that person would repay somehow? What makes it so hard for us to receive what another wants to give? What is it in us that make either or both so difficult?

A gift is something you "give" not because you have to or because you should have. Nor are they given to make someone feel guilty or so that person would owe you. Yes, things are given all the time because someone felt they had to or should have or wanted to make someone feel guilty or that they now owe. But these are not gifts. They are payments, disguised as gifts.

At times our family has received anonymous cash gifts from people that just wanted to give us a gift. Just imagine the joy and the tension it brings. We are so grateful, yet we long so much to know who they are to say thanks, to repay them in some way, to make ourselves feel better. But we have always agreed to never try and find out who gave. We do this to teach ourselves how to receive and to completely honor their gift; to always keep it as a gift.

Twelve years ago God used Mr. Hamilton to teach me how to receive and how to give. I vividly remember his eyes and the tears on his face when he handed the title of the car to me. I would never be able to repay him and he knew that. He had no desire to be repaid. He just loved being able to give. That single act unleashed in me the ability to give without desire to be repaid. Mr. Hamilton died a couple of years ago. What a joy it was for me to tell his widow about the greatest gift he ever gave me. To tell her about the day I learned to receive by watching how to give and how to give by learning to receive.





Cream and Sugar...

Open your Bible to Luke 14:12-14. Simply ask God to open your heart to be changed by the time you will spend in these words from Him. Take and read through the passage without analyzing it, just getting the picture. Now, read it a second time, only this time, pay a little more attention to detail you might have missed.

Answer the following questions to help you get all the details of the passage in your thoughts:

Who was Jesus talking to before these verses? Who does he now turn his attention to?

Looking at Jesus' statement, who would you say are sitting around the table that day?

In your own words, what would you sum up as Jesus' lesson to the host?

Look at the summary you did in last week's lesson. How is this week similar and/or different from last week's summary?



Stir it Up...

You now have the details of the passage in your head. Let's think about the passage a bit more, reflecting on some of the events. No right or wrong answers here-just reflection.

Describe all the ways you can think of that the people listed in verse 12 are different than the people listed in verse 13:

Putting yourself in the host position, what is stirring in your heart right after hearing these words from Jesus? Be honest here and try to record every possible way you would feel.

Jesus says a lot here about being "repaid." In thinking about what he says, how is the party for those in 12 different from the party for those in 13? What is the same?



Take a Sip...

Ok, time to pick that cup of coffee up and get it into our own lives.

Thinking back to the story I told in the beginning, how would you rate on a scale of 1-10 your ability to receive? Why would you scale yourself this way?

On the same scale, how would you rate your ability to give? Why would you scale yourself this way?

In this morning's sermon, we talked about the poor. What has been your experience with the poor? What stirs in you when you think about the poor?

Imagine yourself throwing a party for those listed in 13. Does that excite you or raise fear or dread? Take a moment and write why it excites you and why it would raise fear or dread?

Imagine yourself being one of the people listed in verse 13 and you were at a party for you. What is exciting about that thought? What is fearful about that thought?

In thinking about the last 2 questions, which question was more enjoyable for you to answer and why?

Compare your last answer to the first 2 questions asked under "take a sip". What do you learn about yourself?

To close your time, sit quietly for a couple of minutes and allow the warmth and taste of the coffee to settle in. Just be still.

Now, close with a simple prayer asking the Lord to remind you that you are the poor. Thank him for the banquets he has thrown for you, someone that can never repay him. Ask him to help you learn how to receive by reminding you of how He has given. Ask him to help you learn how to give by learning to receive.

Lastly, think of a way this week you can give a gift to someone completely out of a desire to just give. Think of a way to give it so someone can't repay you or to someone who can't repay you. Set a time and place to make this happen before the end of the week.

The Gospel Is...Green: Week 4

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Your Pastor in the journey,
Mitch White

The Gospel Is...Green: Week 4

Sermon Study for the week of March 2, 2008

Pour a cup...



I remember as a little boy waiting on the day my dad would let me cut the grass. What a treat to know that he would finally entrust me with this great task! I would do it perfectly. I would make sure every blade was cut the exact same height; the edges would be trimmed meticulously, every leaf removed from the lawn. To have the privilege of this responsibility was a wonder to think about.

Well, that probably lasted about a month. It was now a chore, an interruption in my day. I found myself always wondering, why do my parents like being out here? What is it with green grass, lots of flowers, and all the work to keep it tidy? Why put so much work into something that a week later you have to do it all over again? It can't be worth it. I just didn't get it. But I do now.

I love the yard. I could honestly spend every day outside, just working, creating, shaping, and tending. I will find myself so engulfed in this that I skip lunch and work way past dinner. Why? I love the beauty it produces. I love that I can work all day, create, and then see life bloom. I love knowing that I am a huge part of creating that beauty. I love after a long day, just sitting on my deck and enjoying it. It is the single image that allows me to more fully understand day 7 when God rested and enjoyed his creation.

But there is another reason I enjoy it. It helps me to appreciate all that God has given. God has given us creation to enjoy. Look all around the earth, and it is filled with beauty. Spring will paint that even more for us these next months. It amazes me to look around and see the work that God has put into creation and his willingness to share it with us. To allow us to partner with him in taking care of it and be a part of shaping it. What a great privilege.

Yet, I also find myself like I was when I was little. There are days I love the wonder of being able to have this task, and then there are days it just interrupts my life. Taking care of his creation is a privilege if my life allows it but it's a chore when I find other things that I love more. Those are the days I don't get it. Those are the days I wonder what is up with God calling us to take care of his creation. Those are the days I find myself with an ungrateful attitude, missing the investment of beauty that He has placed in my life.



Cream and Sugar...

Open your Bible to Luke 14:15-24. Simply ask God to open your heart to be changed by the time you will spend in these words from Him. Take and read through the passage without analyzing it, just getting the picture. Now, read it a second time, only this time, pay a little more attention to detail you might have missed.

Answer the following questions to help you get all the details of the passage in your thoughts:

This week's passage starts with a comment by a man at the table. In the previous passage, what did Jesus say that would have triggered this comment?

Jesus carries on the dialog with him by telling a parable: a fictitious story that teaches a lesson. Two invitations were always sent: the first to tell about the banquet and the second to let everyone know the banquet was ready and it was time for them to come. There was always plenty of time between the two to arrange your life to be there. Unlike dinners we have today, banquets could also last hours, and even days.

When the servant was sent out to tell the people the banquet was ready, what were the excuses that were given for not coming?

What was the response of the owner and why did he respond this way?

What was the direction the owner gave the servant after this? What was the owner's goal?



Stir it Up...

You now have the details of the passage in your head. Let's think about the passage a bit more, reflecting on some of the events. No right or wrong answers here-just reflection.

The man at the table makes a statement about who will be blessed. Jesus could have simply answered, 'you're right'. But he goes on to tell this parable.

Why do you think Jesus told the parable? What question did the man's statement stir to make Jesus tell this story?

Thinking about the 3 excuses given for not coming, they are very good excuses. But what are the things that are similar about each? (hint: there are many answers here but one answer should make you ask, 'why didn't they tell the host this when the first invitation went out?')

Thinking about the last question more, look back at Luke 14:7. What was the reason the guest were at the party? What are the reasons the guest in this weeks passage don't come to the party?

Why do you think the owner of the house was so angry? Was it more than just the fact that he has wasted a lot of time and money for no one to show?



Take a Sip...

Ok, time to pick that cup of coffee up and get it into our own lives.

Can you think of a time when you committed to something and then later a 'better' offer came along? What did you do? Why did you make that choice? Did you ever regret making that choice?

Can you think of a time in your life when you were very generous, gave money, or time or energy and it wasn't appreciated? What was that time? How did you respond?

The passage we have been looking at is not about "The Gospel is Green" like the sermon. The passage is about the generosity of an owner and the unappreciative attitude of the guest. It's an elaboration of Jesus' lessons to all at the table that day. **To connect the two, how have you had an "unappreciative attitude" toward God's creation?**

What are the things that are more important to you, the things that keep you from investing in God's creation?

Like me as a little boy, what are the things you just "don't get" about taking care of creation? Be honest here. Has this study or sermon challenged or changed that at all? If so, in what ways?

What is one thing you are willing to do this week to let the "owner of creation" know that you appreciate the "banquet of creation" he has created for you?

To close your time, sit quietly for a couple of minutes and allow the warmth and taste of the coffee to settle in. Just be still.

Now, close this week with a simple prayer of thanking God for as many things in his creation you can think of. Thank him for the things you might even take for granted. Now ask him to make your heart more appreciative of his generosity.

The Gospel Is...Simple: Week 5

Hope you are enjoying the studies. I pray you are finding yourself thinking about the Sunday sermons more often during the week and wrestling with the messages. Most importantly, I pray you are seeing your life being affected by simply thinking about the good news of Jesus (the Gospel) daily. To continue to help you, each Sunday I will post a new study on our website to give you more purposeful time around the message. Below is how the studies will work and page 2 begins this weeks series. Enjoy your cup of coffee!

The Studies

...will all come from Luke 14, a chapter that teaches us a ton about the Gospel. Be aware that the studies are not written for the specific sermon for that week but written for the sermon topic. Although, at the end of the study, there are questions that will help you implement the specific sermon more purposefully.

...can be used in various ways: for you individually to spend a few minutes each day or just one day a week. Or, they can also be used as a community group to help the group have further discussion around the sermon for that week.

The Elements

...are based off the imagery of making a good cup of coffee. To get my day started, I love a good cup of coffee. It jump starts me!



Pour a Cup: This is a personal story from my life that is told just to help you smell the aroma, get the taste buds going, to get you ready for the topic at hand. It's a story to build anticipation, eagerness to taste, to get your thoughts wandering and to jumpstart the heart.



Cream and Sugar: Sorry, no black coffee here. You have to have the cream and sugar. This will be the time you spend in Luke 14. In the same way we all add a different amount of cream and sugar to our coffee, we each look at Scripture on different levels. For some you will spend just a few minutes in this section. For others, you will really enjoy spending a good chunk of time here. Look at the passages given and investigate the questions; added to help you get your head around the passage more fully.



Stir it Up: This will be a time of reflection questions around the passage you've just read, and a couple to help you reflect on the sermon for that week. The hope is to stir your heart, to make you wrestle with the passage and sermon in your own life. This will be the harder part-but you have to stir it deep into your heart.



Take a Sip: No matter how well you make a cup of coffee, it's only good when you take a sip. This will be a time of helping you take personal steps to apply what you've reflected on. You can't leave the good news of Christ sitting on the kitchen counter. You have to pick it up, give it a sip, and let it affect your life. If we aren't willing to let it affect our lives, there is no point in making the cup of coffee.

Well, let's get started! Feel free to make yourself a real cup of coffee, find a quiet place to settle in for a few minutes, and open your Bible to Luke 14. Looking forward to having coffee with you these next weeks!

Your Pastor in the journey,
Mitch White

The Gospel Is...Simple: Week 5

Sermon Study for the week of March 9, 2008

Pour a cup...



Over the past summer, I took a three month sabbatical, to give my life a change in pace. During this time, we added onto our home and I was able to do 80% of the work myself. Six months before we began, I put together drawing after drawing, changed plans over and over and counted up the cost. We began with the dream of adding nine hundred square feet with a set budget. But after financial and know how calculations were completed, we decided to focus on adding five hundred.

There were so many things to consider in the process. We dreamed of what we would need in order to have the home for the next five years. We talked about resale value, best things to add to get our money back and what would we just enjoy having even if we don't resale. There were many times we considered not doing it at all; wondering if a move would be the smarter choice. We switched spaces around, talked about what we needed and what we just wanted.

As the months went through, we also found that we began with a "let's have it all" mentality. We approached it with a "dream home" approach and then scaled back from there. We watched our hearts move from a "consumer" focus to a "simple" focus. What we wanted and what we needed were two different things.

Now that our addition is finished, we are excited about all that was added. But most exciting for us is that we calculated everything correctly. We've ended with the satisfaction that our finances were what we planned, the work I was able to do was appropriate, and stayed within what we knew we were willing to give up and what we were not. What a great feeling to know that we don't live day in and day out "over our heads"; having pursued more than what we were willing to give up.

The hardest battle of all was staying simple and not getting extravagant and blowing our budget. It was difficult because of the constant tension between a mentality of wanting it all and keeping it manageable. The wisest thing we did was to count the cost well before hand.



Cream and Sugar...

Open your Bible to Luke 14:25-35. Simply ask God to open your heart to be changed by the time you will spend in these words from Him. Take and read through the passage without analyzing it, just getting the picture. Now, read it a second time, only this time, pay a little more attention to detail you might have missed.

Answer the following questions to help you get all the details of the passage in your thoughts:

Where do we find Jesus this week? How is the crowd he is with this week different from the crowd he has been with?

Jesus turns to the crowd and makes a statement. From this statement, what are the members of the crowd considering?

Jesus then gives 2 examples to consider his point. What is the first example and what does Jesus challenge the crowd to consider?

What is the second example and what does it challenge the crowd to consider?

Jesus then makes a statement about salt. How does this statement fit into the other 2 statements?

How is each example similar and different from what Luke records in last weeks passage?



Stir it Up...

You now have the details of the passage in your head. Let's think about the passage a bit more, reflecting on some of the events. No right or wrong answers here-just reflection.

There is something wonderful about having a large crowd follow you. What are all the reasons you can think of that the crowd was following Jesus?

The statement Jesus makes in 26 and 27 are hard for us to swallow. In light of verses 18-20, what do you think Jesus' point was?

The crowd was following Jesus because of what they could get out of him. Even as a leader, it would be easy to tell the crowd what they want to hear just to have a lot of people follow. But Jesus uses an example of a builder and a king going to war. Of all the examples he could have used, why would he choose these 2?

If you were in the crowd, who would you expect to stop following Jesus at this point and why? Who would you expect to continue following him?



Take a Sip...

Ok, time to pick that cup of coffee up and get it into our own lives.

As you consider your own following of Christ, what are the reasons you have chosen to follow him? What are you hoping to gain from following Christ?

As you read verses 26-27, what stirred in your own heart? What examples from your own life can you think of that would make you consider Christ more important than your spouse, family, and/or yourself?

It's very easy to fall into a consumer mentality when following Christ. What are the ways that you have found yourself tempted to be a part of the Church simply for what you will get out of it?

From listening to the sermon and doing the study this week, what is the cost of following Christ that you have not considered? What are you willing to "hate" in order to follow Christ more faithfully?

Jesus sums up his point and shows that following him is very simple from his statement in verse 31. While the gospel is simple, it is not easy. What would be the hardest things for you to give up if Christ asked you to?

To close your time, sit quietly for a couple of minutes and allow the warmth and taste of the coffee to settle in. Just be still.

Now, close this week with a simple prayer asking God to continue to challenge you in considering the cost of following him. Ask his forgiveness for the ways that you have approached him and the church with a consumer mentality and not out of a willingness to follow and serve him. Thank him for his pursuit of you!

The Gospel Is...Just: Week 6

Welcome to the final week of the series! You've made it! I pray the companion studies have allowed you to ponder the sermons during the week and opened your eyes to ways God is shaping you. I also pray the studies might have helped you to move into a routine of spending regular time looking into the Bible and learning new ways to approach a passage. This final week, we will look at the entire chapter we have been studying and ask, "why would Luke even record this?" Enjoy your last cup of "The Gospel Is" coffee.

The Studies

...will all come from Luke 14, a chapter that teaches us a ton about the Gospel. Be aware that the studies are not written for the specific sermon for that week but written for the sermon topic. Although, at the end of the study, there are questions that will help you implement the specific sermon more purposefully.

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Well, let's get started! Feel free to make yourself a real cup of coffee, find a quiet place to settle in for a few minutes, and open your Bible to Luke 14. Looking forward to having coffee with you these next weeks!

Your Pastor in the journey,
Mitch White

The Gospel Is...Just: Week 6

Sermon Study for the week of March 16, 2008

Pour a cup...



My son Caleb and I coached a 9-10 year old baseball team last spring. It was the first time we have done this together and it was a great experience. Like any team you coach, you hope it will win a lot of games. Well, we didn't. But being a coach, you are looking for more than just wins—you are looking for the team to grow as individuals and as a team. You are hoping that by the end of the season they are putting it all together. Well, they did!

All year we worked on the small things: the fundamentals of hitting, catching, throwing and running. We talked about working as a team, conducted drills to enforce this thinking, and put disciplines in place to operate as a team. It was disappointing as the year went on to not have many wins. But we kept the team focused on ways they were growing as a team and how it would all come together.

Tournament time approached, and we were the next to last seed, which meant we played the number 2 team. Boy, this was a good team. Excellent pitchers, amazing hitters, loaded with talent. My greatest disappointment—I had to be out of town for this game. But they didn't need me. They knew everything they needed to know. They just had to put it all together. Reports were phone called into me and they all made it known that it was an amazing game that we won 3-2! Because of the win, the next day we played the 3rd place team and we put on another amazing show. But this time, they came up 1 run short and lost 7-6. But what a team they had become!

When I returned, more reports came. The best stories were how this team played like a team, how they took all the small things and finally put it all together. How they weren't thinking about all the small things, but the small things enabled them to simply play baseball. And boy, they played it well. That it is what a coach dreams about.

As I reflected on this team, it made me think about how much the small things of walking with Christ, the fundamentals, the disciplines, don't enable me to just focus on those small things. They are not there to keep me focused on what I am doing right or wrong. Instead, they enable me to die to myself and to be focused fully on advancing Christ mission. As I focus on the small things, my desire is that they all come together, and my life looks more fully like Christ.



Cream and Sugar...

Open your Bible to Luke 14. Simply ask God to open your heart to be changed by the time you will spend in these words from Him. Take and read through the entire passage remembering all the things we have seen so far. Try to think about the passage as a whole and not many parts.

Answer the following questions to help you get all the details of the passage thoughts:

We have taken this chapter and looked at short sections each week. This week, try to look a little bigger. In 1-24, Jesus is at a banquet talking to Pharisees. What are the lessons he has taught them and how would you summarize all of them?

Compare how you summarized 1-24 with your summary of the lesson Jesus taught to the crowds in 25-35 (last week's lesson). What is similar?

Whenever you study a passage of Scripture, you have to notice what is before and what is after that passage to get a better idea of what is going on. Glancing at Luke 13:31-35, what is Jesus sad about?

Glancing at Luke 15, who is Jesus talking to? Who are all the people in the crowd and what is being said?

In Luke 15, on what does Jesus focus his parables?



Stir it Up...

You now have the details of the passage in your head. Let's think about the passage a bit more, reflecting on some of the events. No right or wrong answers here-just reflection.

At this point, you should recognize that Luke has painted a picture of not thinking about yourself over others. In fact, he paints the image of dying to your own desires and all the things that would focus attention on what's important to you. Noticing what Jesus is sad about in 13 and who he is talking to in 15, why is chapter 14 important? Why would Luke take the time to record this chapter? How would the book be different if he just left it out?

The book of Luke is known more than the other gospels as the book that stresses caring for the poor. What are the ways Luke challenges his audience to care for the poor in Chapter 14?

What reasons does Luke give for why people do not care for the poor? What are the things that are more important than caring for the poor?



Take a Sip...

Ok, time to pick that cup of coffee up and get it into our own lives.

We have spent 5 weeks looking at different sections of Luke 14. Like the baseball game, it's time to now put it all together. Thinking about the lessons in each week, if you were able to master each of those, what would you imagine your life looking like? Be specific. Allow yourself to dream a little here.

As you unpack this chapter, you see Jesus is calling people to take their eyes off of themselves. As you think about Justice, what would you say drives "justice" in our culture more than anything? To help you think about this, consider that in the last 20 years, our judicial system has added more laws than it had in the previous 100 years. What do you think has driven this?

If you as an individual and us as a country were to take on the attitudes that Jesus lays out in Luke 14, what do you think would happen to our judicial system? What do you think would happen to poverty in our country?

The city of Charlotte is putting plans into place to get rid of homelessness in the next 10 years. After hearing this week's sermon, and looking at Luke 14 as a whole, if you were sitting on the director board for this plan, what would be your counsel?

Like the story of the baseball team, the desire is that it all comes together. To do that, you still have to focus on the basics. In this series we have focused on the Gospel being Popular, Poor, Sacrifice, Green, Simple and Just. Which of these basics would you want to grow more in over these next weeks? What is 1 step you will take to grow here?

To close your time, sit quietly for a couple of minutes and allow the warmth and taste of the coffee to settle in. Just be still.

Now, close this week with a simple prayer asking God to allow you to fall more and more in love with the good news of Jesus: He alone is the gospel!