

Brexit Bible Studies

There are lots of stories of Jesus meeting with diverse groups of people - people from different backgrounds, with different points of view and attitudes about who the 'insiders' or 'outsiders' might be, or thoughts on what was the right way to act in certain places at certain times.

These stories touch on lots of different issues about how we live out our faith and embody our prayers at this time of political unrest. As we spend time reading scripture, reflecting on it individually, talking about it together and trying to make sense of things; it is worth being aware of how we are actively listening to each other and whether we agree or not, how might we acknowledge, understand and make room for other points of view.

Each of the stories has different characters and situations, so it might be helpful to use all of them or to focus on a few that seem particularly relevant.

One way of reading these stories might be to use the practice of Lectio Divina or 'Divine Reading'. As we spend time in the presence of God reading through the text, we are invited to listen for the still small voice of God. Part of the process is cultivating the ability to listen deeply.

After reading the story the 'reflection' questions might be helpful in finding deeper meaning in the story, or to help us think how we might encounter Jesus throughout the day. They can be used in personal reflection or to help a group share thoughts and stories.

Another way of reading these stories together might be to find several different translations of the story and have different voices reading them aloud one after the other, with a few moments of silence in between each reading. Having a few different Bibles or collating these different versions onto a handout so everyone can have a copy is helpful, but as each version is read, encourage people to actively listen to the reader rather than reading from the script on their own.

Whatever method is used, read the story through slowly a few times and notice what is catching your attention.

Jesus Anointed at Bethany (Mark 14 NRSV)

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her.

But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

Reflecting on the story

Take some time to reflect on the story and if there is a group of you, chat about what stood out from the story for each of you.

These questions may be helpful in reflecting or sharing thoughts on the story:

- Is there anything from the story that you had remembered differently?
- Is there anything that surprised you?
- What impression or feeling are you left with?
- Are there any particular insights that you wish to share?

Some more questions you may wish to consider for personal reflection or to help group discussion:

- In reading this passage what is your response to the chief priest's condemnation of the woman pouring perfume?
- Think of a time when yours was the voice of condemnation – is there a particular person that you need to seek forgiveness from?

- Think of a time that you felt condemned – Is there a particular person that you need to forgive?
- Think of a time you spoke out in defence of another – How did that make you feel? How could you have empowered the voice of the person you defended, rather than speaking for them?
- Think of a time that you remained silent – Why did you choose not to speak out?
- Think of a time when you were in the midst of an uncomfortable dialogue – How were you, or could you have been the peacemaker in that situation?
- How can you be a peacemaker in the midst of disagreements in your family, or at work or in church?

There are lots of themes and phrases in this encounter with Jesus that might resonate with our different experiences of the tone of the political process, the divisive dialogue around Brexit and the concern about how this time of political instability will shape an unwanted future for many. Is there anything in particular from the story or from your conversations that resonates for you or the people in the group?

As you continue to reflect and respond:

- What are you curious about?
- What might your prayers in this moment be?
- How might you turn your reflections into actions?

Jesus at Levi's table (Luke 5 NRSV)

After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax-collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?' Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.'

Reflecting on the story:

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Some more questions you may wish to consider for personal reflection or to help group discussion:

- How do we view the others who we sit at tables with?
- What tensions are present at the table and in conversation?
- Who do we think should have a seat at the table? Who are the people we assume would not want to be at the table?
- Who do we assume would not have anything of worth to say at the table?
- Who would we be guilty of speaking on behalf of?
- Who would we be guilty of speaking over?

In this story we see tax collectors and fishermen across the table from each other. Two distinct tribes, but all are called to be disciples. We don't get to hear the conversations or interactions, but what would it have been like to be a fly on the wall?

As you continue to reflect and respond:

- What are you curious about?
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The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge (Luke 18 NRSV)

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." ' And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

Reflecting on the story:

Take some time to reflect on the story and if there is a group of you, chat about what stood out from the story for each of you.

These questions may be helpful in reflecting or sharing thoughts on the story:

- Is there anything from the story that you had remembered differently?
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Some more questions you may wish to consider for personal reflection or to help group discussion:

- How would you describe justice?
- Where have you recognised justice in action?
- What issues have you been aware of lately that provoked a reaction in you?
- How might you seek justice for this issue?
- What things make it easy for us to stop advocating for justice?
- What other justice issues are you aware of in your community, wider society and the world?

There are many places in scripture where we are confronted with the issue of justice. It is often referred to as righteousness and we may not always recognise what is being talked about as

something concerning justice. How might we become more aware of the need for justice or evidence of justice in action in our everyday lives?

As you continue to reflect and respond:

- What are you curious about?
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The healing of a demon-possessed man (Luke 8 NRSV)

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me' — for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Reflecting on the story:

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These questions may be helpful in reflecting or sharing thoughts on the story:

- Is there anything from the story that you had remembered differently?
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- Are there any particular insights that you wish to share?

Some more questions you may wish to consider for personal reflection or to help group discussion:

- How do we treat the many different people and voices that are present in this political process?
- Share about a time when you experienced being dehumanised by someone else.
- Share about a time when you experienced being dignified by someone else.
- Are we demonising a particular person, group of people or any issue?
- How might we be dehumanising people in our everyday interactions?
- How might we dignify people in our everyday interactions?

In experiencing an alternative point of view or opposing voice, do we simply cast them out into the pigs and drive them over the cliff edge, or do we talk with them and show hospitality, learning about their point of view and seeing the person behind the noise and demonised persona?

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- What might your prayers in this moment be?
- How might you turn your reflections into actions

The Mission of the Seventy (Luke 10 NRSV)

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

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Some more questions you may wish to consider for personal reflection or to help group discussion:

- How might we experience welcome?
- How might we be denied welcome?
- Share about a time you received or showed hospitality.
- Where are we bringing peace?

- Where are we seeing signs of healing?
- What are we choosing to carry with us on our journey through this challenging time?

As Jesus sends out the 70, He gives instructions that can sound rather intimidating. What does it feel like in the midst of these challenging times, to be dependent on the hospitality of others? How awake are we to signs of peace and healing in the midst of frustration, anger and division?

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The Canaanite Woman's Faith

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

Reflecting on the story:

Take some time to reflect on the story and if there is a group of you, chat about what stood out from the story for each of you.

These questions may be helpful in reflecting or sharing thoughts on the story:

- Is there anything from the story that you had remembered differently?
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Some more questions you may wish to consider for personal reflection or to help group discussion:

- How does the dialogue in this encounter make you feel?
- Is there particular language that is triggering for you?
- Share about a time when you experienced prejudice.
- How have you been complicit in the exclusion of others?
- How have you experienced inclusion?
- How might you be more inclusive – in your home, your church, your community?

This is an unsettling story, with language that speaks of prejudice and a culture of supremacy. How do we listen, not only to voices that we might too easily consider as other, but also listen to our own voices, those we consider legitimate or worthy and critique them in light of love, peace, patience, kindness and gentleness?

As you continue to reflect and respond:

- What are you curious about?
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