

Looking at Luke 10 - 11

These studies are based on the readings from the Gospel according to Luke chosen for the revised Common Lectionary for Year C, from chapters 10 and 11, but they can be used at any time of the year.

1. Luke 10:25-37 – The Good Samaritan
2. Luke 10:38-42 – Mary and Martha
3. Luke 11:1-13 – The Lord's Prayer

You can do all three studies or pick only those which interest you.

Each study asks you to read a passage from Luke, offers you a commentary which brings today's thinking into dialogue with the text, and some open-ended questions for you to use as springboards for your own discussion and action. The questions are deliberately very open, so you can have space to bring your own experience and questions to the text and take it where you need to go, which may differ from group to group.

If you are coming together as a group, make sure

- everyone can see everyone else
- everyone is included and is encouraged to participate as they would like
- there is room for people to agree, differ, be clear or confused, and be accepted
- people are encouraged to value each other's input, to listen without using that time to work out what you are going to say and without interrupting, and when discussing a question to keep the focus on the question

You will need at least one Bible translation. NRSV is probably best, but others might include NIV or some other new translation.

The sessions are designed to last around 60 minutes and encourage you to explore not only what the texts meant on the basis of the latest historical research but also what they might mean for living today.

Making these studies work for you and your group.

Adapt them to suit your group and its preferences. For instance, you can read the gospel passage and the commentary and then look at the questions *or* you could first read the passage and note anything which popped out for you and then read the commentary, section by section, stopping to talk about anything that arises, before going right through to the end and looking at the questions *or* you could start with a general question on the topic before doing one of the above *or* you may want to circulate the studies in advance, so that people have already read the passage and commentary before they come. Then go through it when you come together in one of the ways mentioned above.

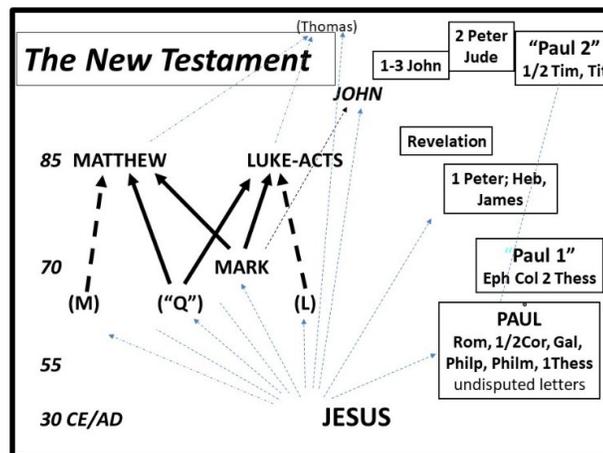
... whatever makes the studies work best for you!

Before we start:

Meet Luke!

Like the other gospels, Luke contains no information about the author. When we move beyond what it actually says to ask when it was written and who wrote it, we are on shaky ground. Luke was a fairly common name. This Luke may be the one referred to as a doctor in Col 4:14 and mentioned elsewhere (Philemon 24; 2 Tim 4:11). Luke also wrote Acts and appears to have been associated with Paul at some points on his journeys, though his account of Paul suggests he did not know him well.

Luke tells us at the beginning that he is not the first to write and that he was writing to give people a firm foundation for their faith. He almost certainly knew Mark's gospel, as did Matthew, and both Luke and Matthew apparently also had another common source which has not survived, but which contained, among other things, the Lord's Prayer and the core of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke wrote his gospel probably some 10-15 years after Mark wrote his, so some time in the 80s.



What we have for sure is what he wrote and in that he challenged the people of his day and challenges us. That is our starting point.

For further information about Luke, see <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/Luke.htm>

Or for a shorter version: <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LookingatLuke>

For weekly commentaries on the revised Common Lectionary readings from the gospels, see my website: <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/lectionaryindex.html>

These studies are prepared by Emeritus Professor William (Bill) Loader FAHA, a Uniting Church Minister and New Testament researcher and teacher. Literal translations in appendices are his own.

Images are Bill's own photos

1. A Good Samaritan – Townsville hinterland
2. Hungarian doll/bride
3. Gethsemane grotto – Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany

Session One

Luke 10:25-37 – The Good Samaritan

Only Luke brings us the parable of the Good Samaritan, but to introduce it Luke draws upon an episode which occurs near the end of Jesus' ministry in Mark's gospel (12:28-34). There a scribe asks Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" to which Jesus replies:

The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." ³¹The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.

Luke has adapted this story to make it the introduction to the parable. His main change has been to change the scribe's question. In Luke the scribe asks: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This, too, Luke has taken from Mark, because it is the question put by the rich man to Jesus which Mark tells in 10:17-22 and Luke tells in 18:18-23.

Why is this significant? It shows us that Luke wants people to understand what God wants if people seek eternal life, life with God in this life and in the life beyond. For Luke it is very clear important. It means loving God and loving one's neighbour but in the way Jesus interprets those central commands. So after the man recites the two most important commandments Luke has Jesus declare: "Do this and you will live".

It was, after all, possible to argue that loving God with your whole heart meant trying to keep every commandment right down to every tiny detail. That is not what Luke (and Jesus) meant. So he has the lawyer ask: "Who is my neighbour?" That question sounds innocent enough, but it assumes that some people qualify as my neighbour and some people do not. Whom should we include and whom should we exclude from being our neighbours?

Jesus does not answer the question, but instead tells a story. This was typical of Jesus. He knew how to tell stories which carried their own messages for those with ears to hear. At one level the story dealt with the familiar, someone making his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho and the dangers one might face.

Storytellers in the ancient world were fond of having three parts to their stories – so it is here. First a priest, also heading down the road, passes by the needy man and does not help. Had he been going the other way, namely up to Jerusalem, there might have been a purity issue that he should keep away from possible corpses, so as not to be ritually defiled and so be rendered unable to perform his duties. This does not apply. So Jesus is implicitly criticising the fact that a priest, who should know better, and who could have helped, did not. A Levite, also an employee of the temple, is also returning home down the road and similarly does nothing to help. Jesus was critical of religious leaders who failed to live up to what God asked of them and they asked of people.

The sharp edge to Jesus' criticism is apparent when he makes a Samaritan the hero who does stop and help. Samaritans, whose roots also went back to the northern tribes of Israel, were often despised because they did not worship at Jerusalem's temple on Mount Zion but rather on Mt

Gerizim, also a holy mountain. So in the parable the establishment got it wrong. The outsider got it right and gave the kind of generous help which would enable the man to recover.

After telling the story Jesus asks: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" Jesus has taken the lawyer's question about who is his neighbour and cleverly turned it around into the question: who was a neighbour, who was neighbourly to the needy man?

The lawyer got the point: "He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise'". Jesus changed the focus from wondering who is my neighbour and who is not, who is to be loved and who is not to be loved. Instead the challenge is to be a loving person.

There are no limitations to loving, to being a caring person. This is also true of God. God's love does not discriminate and nor should we.



Luke is very practical. He wants us to understand that to have eternal life, to share God's life, is to love like God and that has to mean love at the level of compassion and caring. Belief, spiritual experiences, being religious, even having special spiritual status means nothing if there is not this kind of love. Paul makes that clear in his famous chapter in 1 Corinthians 13. Similarly Matthew has Jesus criticise those who call him Lord and can boast of great spiritual accomplishments if they do not take his teaching about love seriously (7:21-23) and gives us an image of the last judgement where the sheep are those who engaged in acts of compassion and caring and the goats those who said the words of faith and did not live it in love (25:31-46).

For Reflection and Sharing

1. What insights or ideas in the passage and its commentary do you find particularly interesting, puzzling or challenging?
2. What is wrong with the question: "Who is my neighbour?"
3. Why do you imagine that religious leaders like priests and Levites (and their equivalent today) might pass by on the other side sometimes? Why might we? And who then are our Samaritans?

Session Two

Luke 10:38-42 – Mary and Martha

Good news or bad news? Clearly the story favours Mary who sat at Jesus' feet. But what about Martha? She rather than Mary is named as the host, perhaps because she was the elder of the two. Martha is left to do all the work while Mary just sits there. Someone has to do the work. She was probably preparing something for Jesus (and Mary) to eat. How unfair!

In a way it would have been the same if it was a brother of Mary doing the work. On the other hand, traditionally Martha was playing the role many women played then and have played since. Does the episode then demean what was traditionally women's work? Perhaps it does, but they may not have been the intent.

Luke describes Martha as "distracted by her many tasks" and Jesus comments similarly: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things". So was Martha being so fussed by getting things ready (or whatever she was doing) that she missed out on what was important? Maybe she had been brought up to be like that, quite possibly because she imagined (and was probably right) that this was what men expected of her. The point is then, not that doing the practical things is worthless, but that making that one's main focus means you can miss out.



In its first centuries the Christian movement did not build churches. Congregations met in people's houses. Traditionally women carried responsibility for running the household, including crafts and agriculture, and men carried responsibility for things outside the household, including meeting with other men, selling crafts and produce, and discussing community issues. This meant that women were largely in charge of the infrastructure that made the meetings possible and sometimes we even read of churches named by the woman who managed the household (e.g. 2 John).

Meeting as a congregation meant that everyone would come together, men, women, children, and slaves. Occasionally we hear that each of them was addressed, as in the household codes in Colossians and Ephesians. If they behaved as people normally did in public meetings, the men would do the talking and the women would listen and might talk about the substance of the meeting with their husbands afterwards. That is clearly the advice which Paul assumes is standard in all congregations, stated clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36.

This partly reflects the fact that most people were married and that usually men married women who were barely over half their own age. They were naturally less experienced and less mature, but this led to the assumption by men that they were inferior to men by nature, a common fallacy. So, they concluded, men should do the talking and women keep silent. There were exceptions. Some women became prophets and there is evidence that some carried leadership roles and were Paul's fellow workers (e.g. Phoebe, Prisca/Priscilla, and some of the women Paul lists in Romans 1). In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul insists that women who do speak should never disguise the fact that they are

women and should always stick to the customary attire of wearing veils, as many middle eastern women still do.

There were probably some men in such gatherings who would have preferred that the women be banned to the kitchen and busy themselves like Martha. Our story at the very least affirms that women have a rightful place beside the men listening to Jesus.

Our gospel values which affirm men and women as different but equal go much further and over time have been undermining the influence which flows from the ancient world's discrimination against women. That women are inferior to men was a view widely held then, and even earlier – found by some in the Greek version of Genesis which could be read as saying: men are in the image of God and women are in the image of men. Paul assumes this in 1 Corinthians 11.

When we recognise the male fallacy which underlay such conclusions, we can affirm that women have just as much a right to speak and be heard as men. Women can vote. Women can be ordained. Women can be prime ministers. These changes, like the abolition of slavery, had to wait until recent centuries to become reality. There must be no discrimination. Men and women are of course different, but they are equal.

This is a very good example of where core biblical values have led us to set aside some specific biblical commandments based on doubtful or incorrect assumptions. For some people taking such an approach to scripture and its interpretation is difficult. It was similarly so for the first Christians when they decided not to impose on non-Jews the commandment that they should all be circumcised if they wanted to be part of God's people. On that issue love won in the end.

So the story of Mary and Martha is both good news and bad. Good, because it affirms a place for women beside men in the community of disciples. After all, Jesus' first disciples also included women. However, not so good because it did not go far enough. Indeed, most of Luke's references to women reflect that limited progress. We are far from having undone the effects of that ancient world of discrimination, as many women can testify. Affirming gospel values about women and men is still a work in progress.

For Reflection and Sharing

1. What insights or ideas in the passage and its commentary do you find particularly interesting, puzzling or challenging?
2. Why did men reach conclusions which we can no longer hold?
3. What is your experience of the struggle to allow gospel values counter discrimination against women?

Session Three

Luke 11:1-13 – The Lord’s Prayer

The form of the Lord’s Prayer as we know it is the longer version found in Matt 6:9-13. The earlier version is the one we find here in Luke. As a prayer it is very similar to Jewish prayers of the day. One of them, called the Kaddish prayer, reads:

*Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will.
May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days,
and in the lifetime of the whole household of Israel, speedily and at a near time.
And say: Amen*

The Lord’s Prayer begins simply by addressing God as “Father”. The simplicity of calling God “Father” almost certainly goes back to Jesus, himself, who in Aramaic would have used the word, “Abba”, a term for the father used in the family setting. Indeed, sometimes we find the Aramaic word left untranslated in the Greek, as in Paul’s comment that the Spirit moves in the believer to address God as “Abba” (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15). It is simple and personal and matches the way Jesus depicted God – as like a father who cares. “Mother” would be just as appropriate. The point is that it assumes we can approach God at an intimate, personal level and that God wants to hear us and respond. Indeed, Jesus sometimes appeals to people to think of God as at least as caring as a good parent, his parable of the prodigal son being a prime example.



“Hallowed by your name” is an acknowledgment of who God is as the holy one. Speaking of God’s name was just another way of speaking of God. So the prayer is really saying, “may people and may we and may I acknowledge that you are God. You are holy”. Acknowledging with a sense of awe the holy nature of God is fundamental to our relationship. Indeed, it is fundamental to all relationships to “hallow” the other person, to respect and honour them for who they are, and especially so in our relationship with God.

“Your kingdom come” picks up a central theme in Jesus’ ministry, who held before people a vision of a day when God and God’s ways would rule. In the light of it he declared: “Blessed are you poor, for you in the kingdom of God. Blessed you who hunger now; for you shall be filled”. Often he spoke of it as a great feast to which all are invited without discrimination. So these words in the prayer are really expressing a wish for that day to come, but also for it to start becoming a reality in the present. Our celebration of Holy Communion symbolises that vision and that agenda and how God’s goodness feeds us with the strength to engage in helping it become a reality in our world.

The prayers which follow reflect basic human concerns for food “daily bread”, forgiveness and protection from hardship. It is not that God will decide whether or not to feed us. Rather the prayer simply expresses one of our fundamental needs, a prayer we can in fact answer for ourselves and can help answer also for others.

To ask for forgiveness is in effect to acknowledge our failures and to open ourselves to receive the forgiveness which God offers us as we face up to ourselves. The prayer carries the commitment also not to hold anything against others. It uses the image of seeing others as in some way in our debt because they have wronged us. Forgiveness is letting go, not holding ourselves back from another person, but showing the same generosity which God shows us in forgiveness.

“Do not lead us into trying times”. The word sometimes translated “temptation” means suffering which might make us give up. In that sense some suffering might be so severe that we give up, indeed give up our faith, and give up on ourselves. So suffering, testing, trial and temptation are connected. Again, this is a very human plea. Protect us! It is not as though God is to be thought as making decisions when and if to give us a hard time. The prayer is not meant to persuade God, but rather to be open before God about our basic needs.

Luke’s version of the prayer ends here. Matthew’s version ends with the addition: “but deliver us from evil”. Later, people added the words, “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours forever and ever. Amen”, probably under the influence of 1 Chronicles 29:11, and to round off the prayer for corporate worship. An earlier form of the addition was known already in the second century and read: “Yours is the power and glory forever.”

Using the prayer in corporate worship probably also led to Matthew’s expansions. So instead of just “Father”, he has “Our Father”, and also adds “in heaven”. This might also relate to the way the first half of the prayer concludes in Matthew where he adds the words: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” – “in heaven” at the beginning and at the end of the section. Style mattered to them. The addition helps us see what it means to have God’s kingdom/rule come already. Matthew’s final addition, “but deliver us from evil” is ambiguous. It could mean “from the evil one” or “evil” in the sense of wrong doing which might be the outcome of failing when confronted by trying times.

Luke places the Lord’s prayer in a setting where he imagines the disciples asking about prayer and then after the prayer has Jesus tell a parable which uses an approach of which Jesus was especially fond. He singles out a generous and caring response from a human being and appeals to his hearers: why can’t you think of God as being at least as generous and flexible as that? The parable of the prodigal son is the best example of this. Why can’t you think of God as being like a caring father? In the parable in our passage a similar argument is made: surely if a friend can be persuaded however reluctantly to respond to another in need, why do you think God will not do so?

Luke is not depicting Jesus as indicating that God will give us everything we want. Rather, the twist at the end of the passage is that what God will give is the Spirit, not the latest flash car! God’s Spirit, God’s life, is really all we need because it sets us free to bear the fruit of the Spirit which is love. Everything else we really need and which others need flows from our being open to love, loving others, loving God and loving ourselves.

For Reflection and Sharing

1. What insights or ideas in the passage and its commentary do you find particularly interesting, puzzling or challenging?
2. How does the Lord’s Prayer also teach us how to pray?
3. What does it mean to hallow God and hallow people?

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name;
(10) your kingdom come;
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
(11) Give us today our daily bread;
(12) And forgive us our debts,
as we also forgive our debtors;
and do not lead us into trying times,
but save us from evil.
*[For your is the kingdom, and the power and the
glory forever. Amen]*

Luke 11:2-4

Father,
hallowed be your name;
your kingdom come.

(3) Give us our daily bread for today;
(4) And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive anyone indebted to us;
and do not lead us into trying times.