

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel meditation for your home*  
*July 7, 2019 – 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 10:1-12, 17-20*

I have a small file folder where I keep newspaper clippings that mention someone in our family, especially their accomplishments, however small they may be. For instance, my dad was a good athlete, so I have yellowed accounts of his winning a decathlon championship in his twenties and a golf tournament in his forties. I also have more recent clippings of our children winning races or contests. I keep these because like most of us, I like to think of the successes of those I know, especially if they involve members of our own family.

In today's gospel we read about Jesus sending out a rather large contingent of followers, seventy-two in all, who were tasked with letting others know that God's kingdom is at hand. The hoped-for era of God's presence and power among them had begun. So, expect change. And apparently change was occurring.

While no clear details are given in this gospel, it seems that the powers of evil were being diminished. Evil spirits were being decimated. Upon returning with excitement, the seventy-two road-warriors were jubilant based on their achievements. But then the narrative changes.

First of all, those successes did not *only* come from their efforts, but because God was working with them. If evil spirits departed, it was God's power forcing them out. If cures and healings took place, it was God at work through them. In other words, give credit to where credit is due.

And the same is true with us. Like those first seventy-two, we have been sent into the world by God. God is acting through us because that's the way the kingdom works. God initiates all good things that happen and acts through us to bring about the good that results. The gospel ends with these extremely important words, "rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Where are they written? In the heart of God. God is always with us as we have been reminded over the last few weeks. God's Spirit "descends" into us, waking us up, pushing us out the door, connecting us with each new day. We are part of the "seventy-two" of this day. And while we might feel alone at times, we never are. That's because while it may not be obvious right now, our names are already written in God's heart. Right now. Today. The kingdom of God is at hand through the work of our hands and those of God.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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*July 14, 2019 – 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 10:25-37*

I never like to be reminded of the story Jesus told in today's gospel. It makes me feel uncomfortable, inadequate, less than I should be. That's partly because the good Samaritan is not only "good," but an example that cuts into the center of our selfishness, our narrow view of responsibility, the way so many of us live our lives by looking the other way.

There are parts of the story that really unsettle me. First, the religious people in the story ignored the poor fellow who had been left half-dead along the side of the road. A priest and a Levite, who made their livelihood by being religious according to the customs of those times. Not only did they not help the wounded traveller, they walked to the other side of the road so that they would not even see him. They were creating an excuse for themselves should anyone criticize them for their indifference. Religious people can be very adept at creating excuses.

Second, the good Samaritan did not carry a list of good things to do. He did not pre-plan his good deeds. Rather, he responded in the moment. When meeting need, he did what he could do to help out. At any moment a new opportunity for virtuous activity might come his way. He was fully ready to respond.

Further, he did not react with minimum effort. He did all he could to help. He applied first aid. He brought the victim to where he could recover. And he made sure that care would be given indefinitely. There was no limit to the generosity of the Good Samaritan. He did not count the cost. His compassion was without limit. He did not do the minimum, but the maximum. From Jesus's standpoint, he is the model for what we are all called to do. The bar is thus set quite high. Jesus likely knew that it would be no small matter to reach for that level of responsibility and care when helping to serve the needs of others. Jesus himself acted this way. It's not impossible, but it remains very challenging.

That's why whenever I think about "the good Samaritan," I am dislodged from any complacency or self-satisfaction that I may currently possess. I recall the saying that the teachings of Jesus are directed to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

So, I ask myself about how I commonly respond to those in my family, my neighbors and friends, even strangers who may be in need of food, shelter or safety, even simple companionship. Then I think about that good Samaritan and wonder what he's suggest I do.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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*July 21, 2019 – 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 10:38-42*

Women were thought of as second-class in the time of Jesus. There are not a few instances in the gospels where their names are not even mentioned, although they should have been. What was the name of the woman at the well? The woman accused of adultery? The woman who anointed the feet of Jesus? There are, however, instances when women are named. Today's gospel is one of those times. As soon as Martha and Mary are mentioned, many know what follows.

I have heard women say that Martha is the patron saint of hard-working women. She does what she is supposed to do around the home. Most likely this means preparing food, cleaning floors and washing clothes. We assume that she does this day after day, year after year. She lives with her sister, Mary, who appears not to help her by doing her fair share of the housework. On one occasion, Jesus, a good friend of their family, is visiting and talking about things that interest him. Mary wants to be close to him and is quite content to sit at his feet (the position of a student) attentive to his every word. While Martha scurries here and there, cooking, dusting and hanging up the day's laundry.

Then Jesus asks which of the two women is doing the right thing, the best thing? And he answers his own question. Mary, of course. Hearing this, Martha's eyes turn heavenward and she says, "What?" (And maybe something else too.)

Here's one way to think about what seems a somewhat odd answer of Jesus. The key sentence is in what Jesus says about Martha. She is "anxious and worried about many things." Well, we can all understand that! How often are our daily lives filled with worry and anxiety over a lot of things? Personal health, money for necessities, survival, our kids, grandchildren, ailing relatives, friends, the difficulties experienced by refugees, those who go to bed hungry each night, the state of the world.

Maybe what Jesus is saying is that we can use a little more trust in God in our lives. Maybe we need to take a time-out from working all the time and simply "rest in God." Excessive stress can wear us down, even kill us. In reality, we all need to work from time to time. But not all the time. God created the Sabbath as a day of rest. Maybe the "better part" of life comes to us when we step away from all that makes us anxious and worried and we simply enjoy God's presence. Breathe easily. And give thanks.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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*A gospel meditation for your home*  
*July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 – 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 11:1-13*

It is said that our prayer life provides a window to our souls. One of our family customs is to take turns leading the prayer before meals. Especially when our older children (who live elsewhere) are present for a family meal, I often nominate one or another of them (especially the one I might be worried about) to lead the prayer. This is my ingenious way of finding out what's going on inside them. Often worries are expressed or fears are named in their prayers. In other words, I find out things about them and their lives that would ordinarily be secret but come forth in prayer. Sometimes, they will simply recite the standard, "Bless us O Lord ..." and then I worry even more.

Today's gospel offers us "the Lord's Prayer" or the prayer that Jesus gave us as his own. Within it is held a precious message about how Jesus (and we, his followers) are to pray. What should be our attitude while we pray, our hopes and expectations, our deeper desires? How should we address God, the Creator of all that is, the incredibly magnificent Universe, the Earth, our home, and all of us who have lived here, live here now and will live here. That God who became one of us, took our nature, walked our pathways, ate and drank with us and gave his all for us. Yes, that God. How should we address that God?

Begin, Jesus says, by using the name of God he found best. The name "Abba." We come close to the meaning of that name with our word, "Dad" or "Mom." It's a word implying closeness and intimacy, familiarity, trust and endearment. Love. We pray that we desire nothing other than what God does: the way of God, the reality of God and the life of God to spread and be present everywhere. We ask that this come about. We want what God wants. Why would we want otherwise?

We ask for nourishment of body and mind and soul. And we say without reservation that we want nothing to come between us and others, just as God does. We want to forgive as God forgives. Generously, fully, without demands, without limit. And finally, we ask in confidence (hopefully) that we will not be destroyed by some final act of decimation. That we be held in existence forever in God, and with God and with all those God has created.

The Our Father is a daring prayer, a bold prayer, and might even be considered reckless or disrespectful were it not given to us by the One who surely knew it was the very best way to pray to God.

David M. Thomas, PhD