

community of

TRANSFORMATION

November 13, 2011

Discussion Guide

Small acts of greatness—Luke 13.10-21

Getting Started: 10 minutes

o What is true freedom? When have you ever experienced it?

Setting the Stage: *Freedom is the heart cry of every single person who lives. As those created in God's image, we were made to be free. However, the reality is that few if any of us really are free. Oppression. Bondage. Poverty. A lack of education. Famine. These all work together to keep many in our world from experiencing the freedom God intended. Even those of us who live in countries and cultures that value freedom find that we are not truly free. We may not find ourselves oppressed by a tyrannical government, yet the oppression of emotional baggage, physical limitations, and spiritual dis-ease can be just as harsh. The heart cry of humanity is for freedom. God has heard and answered this our cry through His son Jesus. In Jesus, God's Kingdom comes and His will begins to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the Kingdom there is freedom, true freedom. But how can such freedom come when Jesus no longer moves among us? Is the hope of freedom lost? Perhaps not. While Jesus may not move among us physically, he lives within us. He brings those that would follow him into God's Kingdom and thus into a state of freedom. So perhaps freedom can come. Perhaps the heart cry of humanity can be answered as the Kingdom comes and God's will is done by those who reside within it.*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Luke 13.10-21.
- In what ways did Jesus bring freedom? What hope of freedom did he provide?
- How might Jesus' actions and words be an illustration of his ministry description in Luke 4.14-21?
- Where do you see a need for the freedom Jesus brings and promises today?
- Do you see the experience of Jesus' freedom in these areas? Is this freedom growing? Can you elaborate?
- What do you think our role as followers of Jesus is in bringing freedom? Would you explain?
- Do you feel that you are fulfilling your role as one who brings freedom? What do you think leads you to act in this way?
- What steps might you be willing to take to join with Jesus in bringing freedom? (As a group consider how you might encourage one another to bring freedom to others. You might consider serving together as a group in one of the three service projects found on our website www.browncroft.org.)

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o Housekeeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Small acts of greatness: Luke 13.10-21

Context and Background

Luke: The Gospel of Luke is the third Gospel in our New Testament. While the Gospel of Luke has much in common with the other Gospels, one can find themes unique to this Gospel. The first such theme is Jesus' concern for the poor. In Luke's Gospel, the poor receive special interest and attention from Jesus. In fact, Jesus' sermon on the plain pronounces blessing on the poor (Luke 6.20). A second important theme is the crossing of social barriers to include the outcast. While this also appears in the Matthew and Mark, Luke intensifies this theme in both the actions and teachings of Jesus. Prominent examples are Jesus' stories of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son (Luke 10 and 15). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is portrayed as having special concern for the poor and outcast. This concern is more than Jesus' own unique concern but is the outworking of God's intentions for all people. As such, Jesus exhorts those who would follow him to show the same concern for the poor and the outcast that he models.

Kingdom of God: The message of the Kingdom of God was central to the preaching and ministry of Jesus (Mark 1.14-15). In proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God, Jesus was speaking about the fulfillment of an expectation held by the Jewish people. At its foundation, the nation of Israel was a theocracy; that is, Israel was ruled by God. While Israel had earthly kings, ultimately, God was seen as the one in charge. The Jewish people not only viewed God as their true king but as the true king of the world. Yet, they understood that the way their world currently functioned demonstrated that God's reign was not fully effective or accepted. The Jewish prophets and rabbis before Jesus spoke of a day in which God would reestablish His rightful reign over Israel and the world. In so doing, the world would be righted to God's original intentions. Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God was that the hope of God's movement to reestablish His reign was being fulfilled. Thus when we read Jesus words about the coming Kingdom, we should understand Jesus to be speaking of those places, people, and structures where God's reign was effective and in play. What is interesting is that Jesus provided a nuanced view of how God's Kingdom would come. In the prophets, God's Kingdom is seen as coming at once. However, Jesus explains the Kingdom's coming to be something of a now-not yet event. The Kingdom of God does come at once. However, it does not come in its fullness at once. It starts small, among people and societal structures that will receive it. This means that a tension is created in the world between what is under God's effective reign and what is not. However, according to Jesus, there will come a day when God's Kingdom grows to encompass all things and people.

Context matters: When we read the Gospels, we often do so in a segmented manner. That is, we often read stories as standing alone with little or no connection to what comes before and after them. However, the authors of our Gospels wrote in such a way that actually develops meaning through the connection of these stories. As we read the stories they chose we can discover themes and theological truths that are not explicitly spelled out. In the present text we discover one such theme, the central concern for the justice in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13.10-21).

The Text

The Kingdom at work (Luke 13.10-17): When Jesus began his ministry, he described the nature of his ministry as one in which God was moving through him in order to address both the spiritual and social dimensions (Luke 4.18-21). The Kingdom of God would right people spiritually and socially. Throughout Jesus' ministry we find demonstrations of power in both dimensions. In the present text Jesus heals a crippled woman bound by an evil spirit. The important point to recognize is the act of healing through which Jesus frees the woman, a direct illustration of Jesus' description of his ministry (Luke 4.18-21). He sets one who was oppressed free and thus demonstrates the arrival of the Kingdom of God in his person. What is interesting is the reaction of the synagogue leader who did not deny the healing but wished to limit it according to religious custom. Jesus reacted strongly to this limitation, stating that the arrival of the Kingdom was more important than religious custom. In fact, the arrival of the Kingdom in his person was the fulfillment of God's original intentions. Jesus then moved to describe his Kingdom ministry more fully through two succinct parables.

The way the Kingdom works (Luke 13.18-21): Jesus explains his Kingdom ministry through two parables which outline how the Kingdom of God is working in and through him. These two parables speak about the growth and influence of the Kingdom of God. First, the Kingdom of God grows like a mustard seed. It starts off small and grows into a large tree in which birds of the air find safety. There has been much discussion as to the identity of the mustard seed. What matters most is the image of growth that leads to a place of rest. The second point about the Kingdom of God is about influence. Jesus likens the Kingdom to leaven, soured dough, which spreads through sixty pounds of flour leavening the entire batch. The point in both parables is that something that appears to be small will one day increase greatly. In one case the ability to give rest grows, while in the other the influence of the Kingdom grows so that it controls everything. It is important to read these parables in their present context for they are tied to Jesus' healing of the crippled woman. In the context, Jesus is explaining his Kingdom action with parables about growth and influence. It seems that Jesus may be countering the Synagogue leader's resistance by stating that the very thing the crowd has just witnessed is what the Kingdom of God is about and that such movement will only increase. The Kingdom may start by granting rest in a small way, one healing, but it will grow so that many will have rest. Second, the Kingdom may start by commanding the freedom of one but it will grow to command the freedom of many.

Application: The Kingdom of God is a movement that brings freedom. It does so in an ever-increasing way. When we consider the how this is possible we need only be reminded that the Kingdom of God grows through the ministry of those that reside within it. The Kingdom of God grows in its influence in commanding freedom and grows as a place of rest for many insofar as those that reside within it act on both the social and spiritual dimensions.