

Week Three

Teachings: Risking Challenge

Open the Gathering with Prayer ~ Choose your own or read Psalm 103 responsively.

Gathering Prompt – *choose one invitation to start connecting with each other and the week's themes.*

Recall an important teacher in your life. Share with the group: Who were they? What did they teach you? How did they teach you? What was it about what they taught that made it so memorable?

Ask people to do an internet image search for “Jesus teaching” or “Jesus as rabbi” before the next gathering and choose one image that appeals to them. Or, as the leader, choose a few images ahead of time to show to the group at the beginning of the meeting. Discuss: Where is Jesus teaching in the images? How is he depicted? How are those who are learning depicted? What do you think he is teaching about? Who is Jesus teaching?

Overview – *a short summary of the chapter to remind participants of the main themes.*

Story ~ This chapter explored three of Jesus' teachings in the temple (taxation, greatest commandment, widow's mite). His teachings attracted many people. It was not just his disciples listening, but also people in the crowd. While Jesus is teaching, people come forward to ask questions.

Political Context ~ The question of taxes is a trick question. If Jesus tells the crowd that they do not have to pay taxes, he will be in trouble with the Romans. If he says that they do have to pay taxes, the Jewish people may see Jesus as a Roman apologist or even collaborator. So, Jesus does not answer the question. Instead, he poses one of his own. He turns the question back to his questioners to determine what they think belongs to God and what they think belongs to Caesar.

Scriptural Precedent ~ There was a tradition in Jesus' time of debating which of the 613 commandments in the Hebrew Bible were the most important. So, when Jesus is asked this question, it was not a surprise. His answer would not have been a surprise to those who heard it either. He cites Deuteronomy 6:4–5, which is part of Judaism's daily liturgy, and then he adds Leviticus 19:18.

Love God and love neighbour are indisputably key commandments in the Jewish faith; however, when taken in the context of Jesus' journey to the cross, they take on a new meaning. Jesus shows his love for God and others by willingly sacrificing his life.

Religious Precedent ~ The temple was a place where rich and poor alike were welcome. People came not only to give donations, but also to find fellowship and support. The widow in the story gives all that she had to live on to the temple treasury. This action is praised by Jesus, who points out that she gave out of generosity when many others gave out of abundance. He invites his disciples to truly see this widow, recognizing the poverty amongst them but also the generous contributions of the least among them to the wellbeing of the community.

Inquiry – *initial questions, thoughts, new ideas arising out of the reading.*

- Which one of the three teachings covered in this chapter intrigued you the most? Why does it interest you? What are some of the implications of Jesus' answers on this teaching?
- If you put yourself in the scene of Jesus teaching in the temple, where do you see yourself? Would you be close by and listening, standing off at a distance, or coming forward to ask a question? What question would you ask Jesus if you had this opportunity today?

Scripture – *re-read a key scripture passage together.*

Read **Matthew 22:15–22** (NRSV) on pp. 67-68 ~ *taxes*

AND

Read **Mark 12:28–34** (NRSV) on p. 76 ~ *greatest commandment*

AND

Read **Mark 12:41–44** (NRSV) on p. 83 ~ *widow's mite*

Discussion – *questions related to the scripture passage.*

Jesus has a specific way of teaching; he is not so much concerned about providing a straightforward answer, but instead about getting people to think about their actions and attitudes. It is helpful to spend time exploring his method of teaching:

- What is his demeanor?
- What is his strategy?
- How do people respond to his teaching?
- What is the risk Jesus takes in teaching?

What do we learn about teaching and learning about faith from these stories? How does Jesus' method compare to our own when it comes to answering questions about Christianity?

Jesus' teachings in the temple challenge us to think about what we value and how well we are loving God and our neighbours and how we enact those loves. How are these teachings connected to the passion story? How can they influence your devotions and practices during Lent?

Living Practices – *practices connected to the theme for participants to engage in between sessions.*

“During Lent you have the opportunity to think about your life alongside the life of Jesus, inviting inward transformation and then outward action” (Levine, p. 13).

Teachability ~ How teachable are you? Sometimes, despite our desire to grow as disciples, we act like the questioners in the stories we explored this week: asking questions for the sake of challenging rather than learning. Or we think we already know the answers, so we are not attentive and open to the new things Jesus is teaching.

- Is there one of Jesus’ teachings that you find difficult to understand or to accept? Spend time reading, researching and thinking about that teaching this week. Contemplate the matter in prayer. Your goal might not be to “figure the teaching out,” but instead to become comfortable with the questions and wrestling with teachings that are difficult with Jesus as your guide.
- Connect with someone whose faith you’ve always admired. Ask them if they would tell you about an important lesson that they’ve learned about being a follower of Jesus. What is the Christian teaching they find most important in their experience and life? Put yourself in the position of student by being curious and asking honest questions.

Close the Gathering with Prayer ~ *Choose your own or say the Lord’s prayer together.*

