

February 5 – February 11, 2012
Tough Questions, Straight Answers: “Seeing is Believing”
Life Notes for Missional Communities

(supplemental reading: The Gospel of John by Paul Louis Metzger)

Pages 55-58 of Metzger supplement this week’s sermon materials. To summarize, Jesus is at a wedding feast when his mother asks a favor – one that he isn’t ready to grant. But Mary really wants this favor, and so our Lord performs the first recorded public miracle.

This week’s **Life Notes** give you many options, but you might not make it all the way through the material. It doesn’t matter. The important thing is to focus, as a Missional Community, on what you sense the Holy Spirit is doing in your lives and in your community. We want the notes to support you, not detract from how God is moving in your midst. This is a week of surprise; so the last thing we want to do is miss God’s surprises by trying to follow some notes.

Note: As we go through **Life Notes**, you’ll see blocks of questions throughout the outline for you to consider. Read each block of questions aloud as you come across them and allow the question that stands out to you, whether difficult or not, to be the one you respond to and share with the group.

A Brief Discussion on Spiritual Formation

The following quote comes from the writings of a beloved professor, pastor and Jesus-follower named Henri Nouwen. In *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*, p. 124, Nouwen writes,

“Only out of the place of solitude and introspection can we hope for community and ministry. The journey inward precedes the journey outward, and the chronology is important. Spiritually, we need to know our selves and God in order to know other people. We need to love our selves and God in order to love each other. Communion with God precedes community with others and ministry in the world. Once the inward journey has begun, we can move outwardly from solitude to community and ministry.”

Talk for a moment about your own spiritual journey and the community journey.

Do you feel like you’re growing in your own intimacy with Father, Son and Spirit?

Do you feel like you’re growing in true community with each other?

The Word

Invite someone in the group to read John 2:1-11 out loud, and ask everyone to pay attention for key words, phrases or ideas that particularly stand out for them in this reading. Learning to listen for key words, phrases or ideas helps us listen in a new or fresh way to what God is speaking into our lives right now. We'll be asking you to read this way all year, as we move God's presence from paper or conversation into our very lives.

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

Did any key words, phrases or concepts stand out while reading the passage? If so, share them with the group. Maybe begin by sharing why you think John chose to include this particular miracle in his book.

Miracles Around Us

This particular passage unfolds the first public miracle recorded in Scripture. Jesus turned water into wine for a wedding feast. Though Jesus told his mother it wasn't yet time for him to publicly display this power, she wanted him to respond anyway.

The longing for miracles and prayers that are answered the way we long for them to be answered is part of the relationship we have with Father, Son and Spirit. God sees things we cannot fully see and is not limited by time and space, but we are. We feel personal pain, loss, confusion or frustration or that of someone we love, and we naturally want God to step in and remove or resolve the issue. This is a completely normal reaction. And many times God does step in and alter the situation or remove the suffering. And many times he does not.

Pastor Randy told us that God is committed to doing the best thing for us – even though we might not see the outcomes as best. God loves us immeasurably, and he responds only out of love, even when we cannot understand his point of view.

Pastor Randy told us about a close friend. This friend's wife and Randy's wife both had cancer, and God healed Randy's wife while his friend's wife died. What was God doing? Was he showing everyone love? He was offering his best – through the eyes of the God of the universe who loves us more than we can imagine.

Step into this tough subject with each other. Be honest, be a good listener, don't try to "fix" any one else's situation. Just be with each other and reflect.

Where have you desired and then experienced a miracle?

Where have you prayed for a miracle but felt disappointed in what seemed to be no miracle?

In what ways have you seen good come out of some historical or current suffering, unfulfilled need or unresolved issue in your life?

Jesus didn't work alone.

While Jesus could have just filled the stone vessels with wine and skipped the part where he asked the servants to fill them with water, he chose, instead, to include others in this miracle.

Can you think of a time you've been used by God to be part of a miracle for someone else? Do you think you were aware at the time? Do you think the other person(s) was aware at the time?

Can you think of a time someone else has been used by God to be part of a miracle in your life? Were you aware of that involvement at the time? Do you think the other person was aware?

Where is God showing up?

Pastor Randy titled his sermon, "Seeing is Believing." What did the people see? Scripture says they saw Jesus at work, revealing his glory, even though only a handful likely understood what had happened. But for those who were able to see, they saw glory revealed, and Pastor Randy challenged us all to look for God's glory revealed each day in some specific way.

"God, show me your glory. Please open my eyes to see all you are doing."

And he added,

"The more you see his works the greater your faith will be."

We know that questions like this are often difficult to discuss. It's much easier to talk about knowledge-based questions than personal experience questions, especially when they involve some of the tougher questions of our faith. But learning to see God at work right here, right now, each day in our very individual lives moves our faith from something that primarily affects our future or our gatherings to something that impacts every thought, every action, every relationship. It takes time and practice to learn to respond to questions of the heart rather than questions of the head, and we want you to know we appreciate you joining us in this journey.

We are each facing difficulties, uncertainties, questions, changes in life or challenges in relationships. Think about the following questions and share with the group.

Where have you seen God's glory show up in your life in the past 24 hours?

Where have you wanted to see God's glory show up but couldn't find him...couldn't discern what he is doing in your life right now?

Who, in your life, needs to see Jesus the way you're learning to see Jesus?

Where in your life do you need to invite Jesus to be present? (Perhaps there's an area of your life or a relationship that you try to distance from your more spiritual side.)

For Missional Communities following a different track than Pastor Mark's sermons.

Please allow 15-20 minutes for those in your group to respond to this two-sided question:

Where have you seen God's glory show up in your life in the past 24 hours?

Where have you wanted to see God's glory show up but couldn't find him...couldn't discern what he is doing in your life right now?

Next week's sermon text will be on marriage.

Thank you for taking time to form together around questions and personal sharing. Responding to questions has long been a formative experience, and we appreciate you stepping in to this kind of intimacy with each other. Your honesty opens up dialogue about God and our response to God's presence and daily work in our lives. We prefer answers, but sometimes God is best understood as we share in questions together.