

Practice Guide for March 24th 2024

Into the Wilderness, pt. 5—Parade of Paradox

Suggested Ice Breaker (5 minutes)

Rather Than

Get everyone sat in a way so that they can all see each other - we recommend sitting in a circle. Start by telling everyone else one thing that you like to do (e.g., run 10km). The person to your left then restates what you said and then says something that they would rather do (e.g., run 10km, eat a whole tub of ice cream). The next person member then restates what was said and adds on what they would rather do (e.g., run 10km, eat a whole tub of ice cream, do a skydive). Continue until every person has said the whole list before them and added on what they would rather do.

Opening (5 minutes)

Before beginning, open the meeting time with 2 minutes of silence to help you focus on interaction with God and one another. At the end, ask someone to open the gathering time with prayer asking for guidance in living in Kingdom of God.

Question for the group: How do you plan to celebrate the remainder of Holy Week, especially good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, do you have any family or cultural rituals you enjoy?

Reflecting On Scripture (25 minutes)

Have someone read Matthew 4:5-11 and someone else read Matthew 20:28.

Questions for discussion:

1. In this account of Jesus' third temptation, what details are surprising or new to you?
2. This is not the last time Jesus would be presented with an opportunity to bypass suffering and grasp for power or control. Can you think of a few other instances in his story (explicit or implicit)?
3. What is different about the way Jesus handled power than how we are often encouraged to use it today?
4. Is it difficult for you to believe that Jesus came to serve you? Why or why not?

Have someone read Matthew 21:1-11.

Group Discussion: History tells us that Jesus' Palm Sunday parade to Jerusalem on a donkey happened on the same day it was customary for the Roman governor to have their own parade on the opposite side of the same city—in a display of power and might. Does knowing this bring new insight to the actions and symbolism Jesus used that day.

Community Practice (20 minutes)

Have someone slowly read aloud the following quote. Afterwards, pause for a moment to reflect, then briefly discuss it as a group:

What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life. — Henri Nouwen

Take 3-5 minutes to journal your response to these questions:

1. In what ways am I often tempted to put myself ahead of others? What does it take for me to resist those temptations?
2. In what ways have I been striving to attain something (noble or otherwise) by the world's methods? How is the Spirit inviting me to let go of that striving and embrace Jesus' upside-down kingdom?

Share your answers in groups of two or three.

Group Discussion:

- What kind of impact would we have on our family, friends and/or coworkers if we truly became a people who lived according to the upside-down Kingdom of Jesus? How could that help re-write people's opinion of Jesus?
- Society's Alpha course begins next week. Alpha provides space for people to work through their questions, as well as gain a fresh perspective on God and faith. Is there anyone in your life who might be open to attending with you?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Take some time to pray for anyone who might be desiring to bring a friend to Alpha—take a minute to name them in your prayers. Then, have one person close in prayer, and/or slowly read aloud this prayer from John Paarlberg:

*Triumphant Lord, we rejoice in your entry into the world and into our lives!
Joining with the crowds, we sing your praises and exalt your reign,
but even so, our hearts are far from true worship,
our minds are distant from true understanding.
We are disappointed with your humility,
we are uninspired by your selflessness.
Our sin leads us to give you death
even though you give us life.
Our treachery guides us to war
even though you call us to peace.
Help us to reflect in our lives the glory of your Son
and to live faithfully here and now.
Have mercy on us, Savior of all,
find us in these forsaken places.
Forgive what we have done and who we have been.
Bring us home again and impart within us a new song of joy and celebration. Amen*