

LUM SUNDAY DEVOTIONAL
OCTOBER 16, 2022

GREETING: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: LUKE 14:28-30

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

BLESSED THOUGHTS: "SIT AND THINK"

When I began to study the Old Testament in Hebrew some fifty-years ago, I was struck by how often the same verbs were used, over and over again. The most common words in the Hebrew Scriptures were (a) the various forms of 'to be,' followed by 'say,' 'walk,' and 'see.' But also very common was the word meaning 'to sit.' In fact, this word was often used to describe kings, since they 'sat' on their thrones (while everyone else stood).

Now, have you ever heard a religious teacher speak on "the blessedness of those who sit and think?" For some reason, a lot of pastors I know would rather have their people running around, doing things. In fact, when I was in seminary, one of my professors went so far as to tell us not to have an office. "You'd be much better off actually going out to visit your people." Go! Go! Go! Yet Jesus actually says something else. There are important times when Jesus' followers need to go somewhere quiet—and sit and think—and plan!

I really get the feeling that—right now—is one of those times. In fact, after the worst of the pandemic a lot of people are re-thinking that forty hours a week they spend working. "Do I really want to commute to an office, or should I stay home and work from there?" One company found that when employees did not have to fight traffic at the beginning and end of each workday, their productivity actually went up.

Church leaders find they have to sit down and do a lot of thinking about where they need to go from here. My home congregation is facing a lot of new challenges—with attendance, finance, and the lack of volunteers coming forward to keep things running. Our Bishop shared how he meets with pastors to talk over the challenges that all churches are facing—and they are many, and serious. If anyone thought that things would just go back to normal or be like they used to be, they're finding out that this is far from the case. Everything has changed, and more and more we need to (1) sit down together and (2) plan on how best to carry on God's work.

Now some would say, "We never did it that way before." ***Those are the Seven Last Words of a Dying Congregation.*** I served a congregation that refused to plan how we needed to change, so...we changed all right, if you call going out of business a change. ***Failure to plan is planning to fail.*** The Covid-19 pandemic did not cause the decline of the church, but it did speed it up. Yet we do need those three things that call us to worship: (1) the grace that we find only in the Presence of Jesus Christ; (2) the wonderful love which our Creator gives us in so

many ways; and (3) the real encouragement and joy we get when the Spirit binds us together with other believers. I believe we need to sit and think how we can together open ourselves to God's grace, love, and life-together, even as we need to sit and think and plan how we can heal our broken climate, make our cities safer, and fix all the other problems we face.

One thing I have learned from my days working with young people. ***Something special happens when we sit together in a circle.*** We're better able to see one another's faces, no one is "above" the others, and—most of all—no one is alone, in a chair, all by him or herself. Families sit that way around the supper table. The family of God needs to as well.

Yes, as God's people, we still need to 'go' and 'see' and 'do' and 'talk,' but let's listen to Jesus so he can bless us as we sit and think. Amen

PRAYER

Show me, Lord, that the things I fear usually appear three times bigger than they are.

Show me, Lord, that the help you send often appears only about a third of what it is.

And as we grow quiet, let us imagine that we are all sitting together on your lap, with our heads near your heart, growing very peaceful, and then:

Make us masters of ourselves that we can become servants of others.

Take our minds and think through them.

Take our lips and speak through them.

Take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen

—written at a time when it was raining too much to work outside, so I had time to just sit and think—and write