Week 1 Journal Response Tina Buzak

1. So at first I wanted to talk about Joseph, because he has always fascinated me. But Joseph's story is in Matthew's gospel so I will have to let him go ☺

So I picked Zechariah (by the end of this I won't have to look and see how to spell his name each time I type it). At first I was struck by the similarity between him and Abraham (before you mentioned barrenness in the PPT, sometimes I actually make connections). He has a barren wife, and he is following God the best way he knows how, by being a priest. And for both Zechariah and Abraham, the promised child arrives, just as God said he would. Thus we have 2 situations where God keeps his word with a very tangible "package" at the end. Imagine being told you would be having a son and then having the son show up 9 months later! It is definitely something that needs to be believed with the spirit because I'm not sure the mind could get wrapped around that.

I also liked how Zechariah (still have to check if that first vowel is an "e" or an "a") was chosen out of all the other priests doing their duties. God had been silent for quite some time since the end of the old covenant scriptures and now He is clearly talking again. And Zechariah is the one He is talking to. I sometimes wonder how God decides who is going to do what. Like why is John Carter, the prophet here in central NY? Why wasn't it some other pastor? You know? I don't mean any disrespect I just wonder how God decides who gets what assignments. Believe me I am grateful that I get to have a pastor who is also a prophet & teacher.

Pastor Josh Finley taught us that God silenced Zechariah to keep him from speaking things like doubt and disbelief over his son while he was in the womb. I think that is a really interesting idea. Because there's a lot of medical evidence now about speaking to kids before they are born. Back then there was God evidence. He knew that John could have inadvertently caused trouble, so in His wisdom, God "shut him up".

I also like that Zechariah is obedient to God in the naming of his son. He breaks free from the traditional family naming and gives John the name God asked him to. His name means grace. Isn't that cool?

Zechariah was old when John was born so I think that was good. It would have been hard to witness how John's life ended as a dad. So I'm glad that God spared him that trauma. After all, even though he doubted, he was a faithful man, doing the work of the Lord and ultimately was obedient to what God asked of him. I think his story is interesting and I admire the very human and realistic way he walked it out.

I reread the question and left out the what do I want to learn part. I want to learn to trust God for really big things and to wait patiently. I want to be able to hear God. Zechariah heard, trusted (mostly) and waited. And he got what was promised to him.

2. I am having a hard time writing this down. I begin most of my morning prayers thanking God for Jesus. And guess what? Since I last took a class with you God has allowed me to begin praying with people during outreach events. Only by His grace could I do this, but apparently I have a little gift in this area. So now I could pray this prayer outloud, but I can't write it down. So I'm going to try and type as fast as I speak (and try to slow down my thoughts, ha!)

Father,

Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for His obedience and for His sacrifice on the cross. Thank you for what He has purchased for me. Thank you for sending Him to show us what you are like. Thank you that He is both fully God and fully human. Thank you that He is outside time, with you, and knows the end from the beginning for me. Thank you that His blood redeemed me and as it says is Psalm 103 He rescued me from destruction. Father no gift is greater than your son. Nothing is more desirable.

Father – Help me to trust that what you say about me is true. Help me to be like Zechariah and to do what you have assigned me to and then to be ready to listen when you show up. Help me to trust you without correction like Zechariah needed. But Father, correct me and guide me when it is needed to draw me closer to you and to being in a better position to receive all that you have for me, the abundant life John promised! Thanks. Amen!

Tina Buzak Luke Week #2

1. Prayer for the Church

Father – We magnify and glorify Your name. We stand in awe of Your glory, majesty, mercy, grace and love. We are so grateful that we are called children of God.

Father – we children are having trouble down here on the earth. Too many are walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit. Many of Your children are living in fear and are bound by anxiety. The virus has caused many to forget who their protection and who their healer is!

Father – a spirit of laziness has afflicted Your people. It is "easier" to stay home in the comfy clothes and turn on church on the computer and not have to concentrate and listen that hard. And if it gets feeling like too much conviction, there a lot of other things people choose to do, instead of sitting in the conviction and getting some healing and help for it from you Lord. People don't come to the church and they don't serve in the church. It is weakening Your body, Father. Heal and help us to overcome the neurosis, fear and laziness that Satan has loosed upon the church. We cast him down AGAIN and trample on him.

Father – a spirit of deception and divisiveness have infiltrated Your body, the Church of Jesus Christ! We have traded in truth and reason and open mindedness for deception from the world. We have traded in unity and love for a horrible divisiveness that has ripped apart the church and tarnished her image and greatly diminished the power of her testimony. Bind up our wounds. Speak truth, the real truth into the minds of the deceived. Hold us together in the palm of your hand, in a way that nurtures each of us and then helps the young to learn how you want us to live in love, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, joy and self control. Help us, save us, deliver us, as only you can do with your life changing transformational love!

Reflection (didn't know if you just wanted us to reflect, or if you wanted evidence of reflection.)

I used to fall into condemnation a lot when I was thinking about the temptation, so I was real glad that there was such a great teaching to help me understand that Jesus overcame sin by NOT doing the things he was tempted with. It wouldn't matter which small sin that Satan tried to entice him with, Jesus leaned into His Father and received strength to walk through the temptation bring God's word to each reply. Jesus was able to defeat the enemy in his own turf!! So I'm not really sure how I can be of use to the Church. It is one of the most challenging things of being a member of a big church. Where do I fit? And if I think I might fit somewhere what do I do when there is no room for me in that spot? But the good news is, at least at this point I can believe that God could use me, that I am not disqualified for or by my past and that the healing He has done in me can be used.

Still Tina Buzak Luke Week #3

1. The first group appears to be the people who don't have many material things. They also are outcasts, have difficulties or sorrows in their lives (weeping), and generally don't have much power or esteem or respect. The second group (woe to you….) seems to have stuff, lots of stuff and they seem to also have status. They probably have Porsche camels and swimming pools in their courtyards! My guess is that they think they are a lot better than the other group!

I think we have to be very careful about putting people in groups because we don't know a man's heart. BUT it also seems kind of obvious that the first group is probably the poor and the lost (not geographically), those who are stuck in cyclical poverty without God. People without hope. People who have been oppressed either by systems or by families. People who are refugees, escaping from horrible circumstances. People of color. Maybe even people of other faiths who haven't yet heard of or come to Jesus. (I know these are not sentences…..) The second group reminded me of wealthy suburbs and the people who live in them. I know that we really shouldn't judge, but doesn't it seem like Jesus is saying, "Hey, you have it all, the money, the big house, the designer health insurance, the prestigious job, the boat and the time share NOW, but you are missing something big and you are not headed for blessings in the future.

I always find this teaching a bit convicting. I grew up in Chappaqua, NY. My parents were not wealthy but we were comfortable and they were frugal and sacrificed so I could go to the good schools there. I am well educated and I have had a good career with steady employment and the promise of a pension. I have excellent health insurance. I have more than I need. So I always wonder which group I am in. Because I don't want the "woe to you" ending. I want the other. But I'm not poor either monetarily, or in spirit. And I have mourned and wept, but not all the time. So when I look at the literal part I am blessed to fall where I do, BUT I don't want to be there. But honestly I don't want to be in the other place either, because it is hard there.

Questions 2

1. a. You who are listening – Jesus draws attention to this group because they are listening. When you are a preacher I imagine you might want to focus on the people who are focused on you! These are people that have heard about this new rabbi and have sought him out to hear him or to receive healing or restoration. These are people with an open heart and spirit. They might also be people who are tired of the hierarchy and pompousness of the Pharisees. They might be tired of trying to keep a law that they will never be able to keep. Maybe they are the lower class of society and have heard the things that Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for and are happy and think He is on their side.

b. Jesus commands the people to "Do unto others as you would like them to do to you" (How I wish I could get my students to do this)

c. Enemies do mean things: they hate and hurt, curse and slap, steal and abuse. Thankfully at the moment I don't have anyone close to me who acts like an enemy. There have been some in the past.

d. The responses that Jesus teaches are counterintuitive at the least and somewhat insane (by human standards) at the most. Each example definitely goes against the typical human response to "enemies". But Jesus doesn't want typical disciples. He wants disciples who show the world God and His love. He wants disciples who walk in His ways.

I think teachings like this almost make me grateful for my isolation. Because I don't have that many people in my life, I don't face as many enemies. And I am very cautious about who I let into my life. However, Jesus is not just talking about friends here, it is anyone who crosses your path in life and does something to harm you.

I have to say that I have tried praying for people that have hurt me a little, knowingly or not (the hurt not the praying) and it does change me on the inside. I think it helps me to put it in God's hands when I pray for my enemies. I give to a lot of people who ask, because Rev. John Tumino taught us once about things that panhandlers needed. So I keep some of those things in my car and I respectfully ask if they would like something.

I have to confess they all seem really hard. But maybe that is why they are there…..to spur some people on with a light heart!

Questions 3

a. The You and the Sinners are doing the same thing here. And I really liked the NLT translation…"why should you get credit?" If you are doing something and the world is doing the same thing, how can you be called "set apart" or a citizen of a different kingdom? I think Jesus taught it this way (as if I could EVER know the mind of God!) because it is very practical. This is what they do. If you do that, you are just like them. You don't get credit for being like them (I know Christianity is not a merit system) because you are supposed to NOT be of the world.

b. The love Jesus wants us to have for others is definitely sacrificial. It is not self -serving. Don't judge or condemn. Love people, even the hard to love, do good, lend, be merciful, forgive are all acts that sound like Jesus' ministry. And they are sometimes not easy to do, actually a lot of the specific examples are hard to do. You have to take yourself out of the equation and just put God or the Holy Spirit in your place. Otherwise it would be hard to do these things.

I would need to work on not judging. I've been working on it for a few years. It is definitely better, but sometimes that well - worn superhighway of judgement is the path my brain follows at first. I don't just want a roadblock there….I want to totally rip up that highway. I have learned to forgive, but I could probably learn to do it a bit faster! And my students are seeing the most merciful version of a teacher that I have ever been. Since their faith says little about the grace and mercy of God in our lives I try to teach about it by showing it (up to a point…then the disciplinarian kicks in.

I am doing this on Sunday so I will try and put less judgement into my coming week.

Guess what? It's Tina! Week #4

So……because of the way my week goes, especially this week that just ended, I am doing this homework on Sunday. Therefore I have NOT done what you asked for the past week. I will do it in the week ahead. But I already have a few comments (I'm sure you are not surprised.)

1. I almost always end my day by turning out my light, getting comfortable in bed and then saying, "Thank you Papa, for my day." I am not sure when I started this, but I'd say at least before COVID (Don't we all mark time that way, now?) I thought the idea of greeting the Lord in the morning was really cool and I can't wait to start. I will have to put a sticky note on the bathroom mirror, since I get up early and function on autopilot until I get in the pool.

2. Just recently it was recommended to me to ask God each day for something I need, want and desire. This has been VERY interesting. The desire one has vacillated back and forth between 2. The other ones: need and want, are all over the place. I already know the things I desperately want from God. I usually lack the confidence and or faith, or both, to actually ask. But I was told that if I don't start asking they won't happen. I

need to ask even if the faith is not there, because I need to establish a spiritual pathway so God can get them to me. THAT forced me to ask, even though I have a lifetime of NOT asking for things in order to avoid disappointment, or the answer being “no”. It gets complicated and you are a teacher, not a psychologist, so I’m not going to drag you in to it all. So I have done #5 to the best of my limited ability for the past 6 weeks now. And I have to say what I notice is that I do not have the hard edge of disbelief that these things will ever happen. There is more hope now.

3. I will try hard the sit with God thing. This has been a huge challenge. I don’t sit real well to begin with by myself. So I often make it about 3 – 5 minutes. Or I fall asleep. But I will try and be still. Pastor John also referenced this type of activity the last time I had a couple of minutes to speak with him.