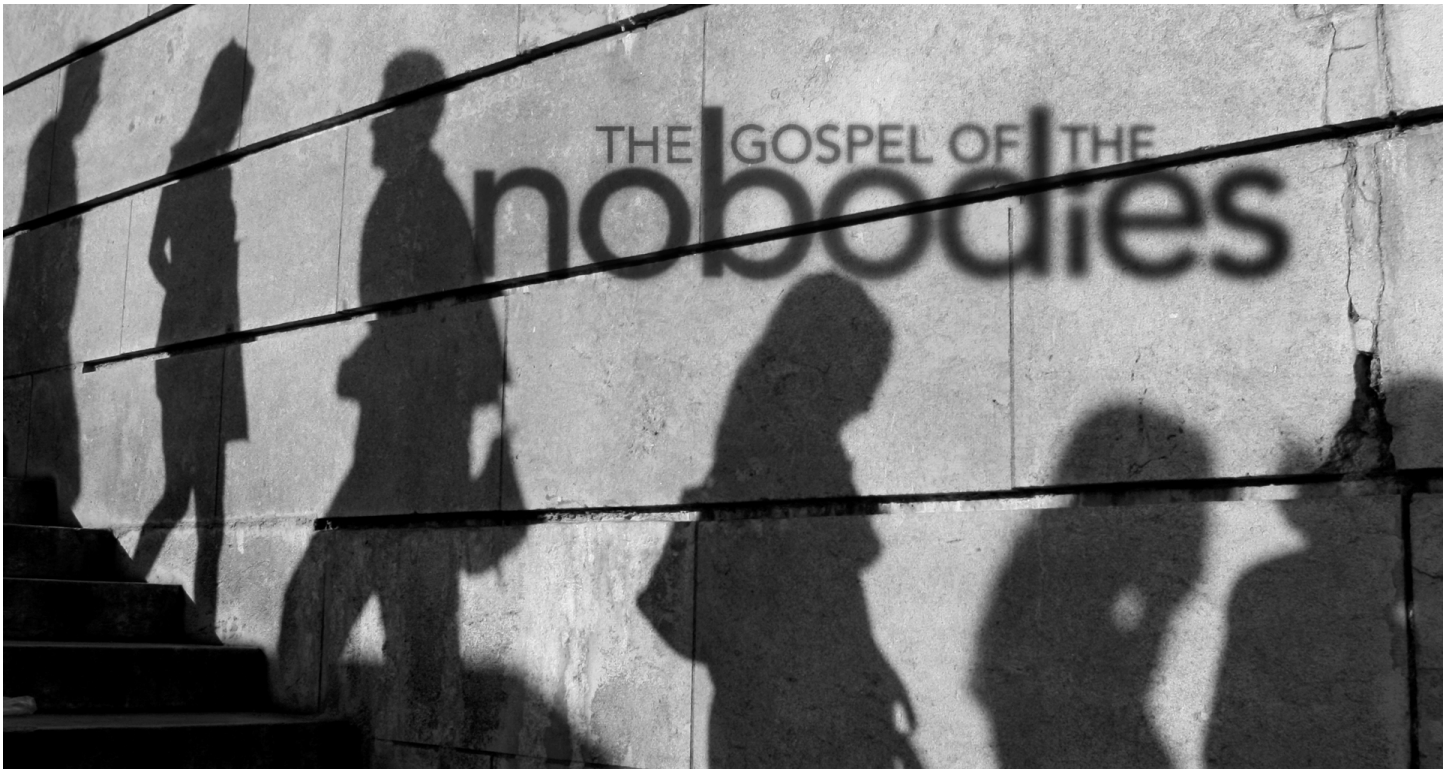

LENT 2022
GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Most of us have at some point felt like a nobody – insignificant, invisible, worthless. While all four Gospels can give hope to those who feel that way, the Gospel of Luke has a particular focus on Jesus' ministry with those who were considered nobodies.

This Lent, join us for a powerful worship series that explores that ministry. Each week, we'll turn our attention to specific stories that illustrate Jesus' concern for those who were marginalized by society, and as we do, we'll hear his word for our lives today.

This guide is designed for individual or group use. Sermons in this series are available at MiddletownChristian.org/Sermons.

Content and questions by Rachel Freeny & Brian Gerard.
Series art and title used with permission from United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.

March 6, 2022: The Nightshift Workers

Key Scriptures: Luke 1-2:20

While this may be the first message of our Lenten series, we begin our journey toward Easter with the story of Jesus' birth. While it may seem like a strange place to start, the way God enters the world sets the stage for what is to come. Before Jesus can even utter a word, his message of hope for the nobodies of the world is being made clear.

Discussion Questions:

1. In ancient Galilee, the city of Sepphoris was a seat of power, wealth, and sophistication. Its population was made up of the "somebodies" of the area. Nazareth had no power, no wealth, and little sophistication. Its population was made up of people who often provided labor to those in Sepphoris. The people in Nazareth were often referred to as the "nobodies" of the area. Why are these facts important to our understanding the story of Jesus' birth?

2. If you have had children, or if you were to ever have children in the future, who would you want to be the first people to hold your child/children? Why? Why do you think God chose the nightshift shepherds to be the first people to meet the Christ child?

3. People from Nazareth, including Mary and Joseph, as well as the shepherds were often marginalized, both by society and by the community of faith. Who are among the marginalized of our society?

4. Who are among those who are often not fully included in communities of faith or in the church? What can be done to help them be more embraced and included?

5. While the message of Luke focuses a lot on the marginalized, it is not just a message of hope for them. It is also a message for the somebodies of the world. What is that message? Why is it a message of Good News for both groups?

March 13, 2022: The Disabled & Sick

Key Scriptures: Luke 4:18-19, Luke 4:16-30, Leviticus 13:45-46

In the ancient world, the disabled and the sick were often kept at the margins of society. In many ways, they were defined by their condition and people saw their illness or disability before seeing their humanity. While we have come a long way, there are still times we treat the sick and disabled in similar ways. Through one of the most touching stories of his ministry, Jesus teaches us a better way.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Luke 4:18-19. According to this passage, what does Jesus describe his mission on earth to be? How does this passage inform how Jesus calls us to live our lives in the modern world?

2. Read Luke 4:16-30. When Jesus first returned to Nazareth, the people there were so glad he had come home. But after he speaks some challenging words, they become so angry they try to throw him off a cliff. Why did they respond that way? In what ways is that like how we respond when we find Jesus' message challenging?

3. In the ancient world, lepers had very strict rules by which they had to live (see Lev. 13:45-46). While some of those rules were about community health, they ended up creating a reality where lepers were defined first by their condition, then by their humanity. In what ways does that speak to how we view people with illnesses, injuries, or disabilities?

March 20, 2022: The Demon Possessed

Key Scriptures: Luke 8:26-39

While demon possession is something we have largely relegated to horror movies and supernatural television shows, in the ancient world, it was seen as something far more real and far more frightening. Because of that, those deemed to be possessed were among the most outcast and oppressed in ancient society. But once again, Jesus sees past the perceptions and into the hearts of those defined as nobodies and gives them new life.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Luke 8:26-39. What stands out to you in this story? What questions do you have about what took place and why?

2. When you hear the words "demon possession," what comes to mind?

3. Many scholars believe that what the ancient world understood to be demonic possession was in many cases some kind of mental illness, neurological disease, or addiction. What do you think of that explanation? If true, how does that impact the stories of demon possession that we read in scripture?

4. What are some of the "demons" we face today? How can we "exorcise" them from our lives?

5. While the man in this story was healed, the swine herd was lost. When people saw and heard what had happened, they were filled with fear and asked Jesus to leave. Why did they do that? What does this say about the things they/we value most?

March 27, 2022: The Homeless Beggars

Key Scriptures: Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 25:40

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most familiar passages in scripture. On one level, its message is clear – take care of the least of these. However, as is often the case with the parables, there is a much deeper message to be found. It's not an easy message to hear, but it has the power to transform who we see as our neighbors and how we are called to treat them.

Discussion Questions:

1. The following picture is called Homeless Jesus. What is your reaction to this piece of art? Why do you think some people had such negative reactions to its placement outside of a suburban church?

2. Read Luke 10:25-37. Most traditional interpretations of this story point to the idea that we are supposed to follow the Samaritan's actions and care for those in need. While that is certainly true, part of the lawyer's initial comment is that the law calls him to love his neighbor as he loves himself. Who is the neighbor in this story? What does it mean for the lawyer to love him?

3. Read Matthew 25:40. What does this passage mean? Who are the least of these in our society? In what ways do we treat them/not treat them as we would Jesus?

4. While we are often critical of the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan, there are some religious justifications for why they walked by, like ritual purity. What kinds of justifications do people use today to avoid helping those in need?

April 3, 2022: The Invisible Woman

Key Scriptures: Luke 7:36-50

Stereotypes are often used to help us make sense of the world and people around us. But that doesn't mean they are harmless or even true. In the book of Luke, Jesus often asks people to look beyond the labels they have applied to other people. In this week's message, we explore what's possible when we let go of stereotypes and really see people for who they are.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do we stereotype individuals and groups of people?

2. How do stereotypes harm people?

3. Who are the people we are not seeing because of stereotypes we have?

4. What is the danger of dehumanizing a person or group of people?

5. How do we let go of stereotypes and change the way we see people?

April 10, 2022: The Thief on the Cross

Key Scriptures: Luke 19:28-44, Luke 23

While most Christians are familiar with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, there was another entry into Jerusalem that took place at the same time. Those two parades could not have been more different. Neither could the people they honored or the message they carried.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Luke 19:28-44. While Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday is familiar to most Christians, there was another parade that took place that day. According to the sermon, what was that parade? Why is it important to remember both and what does each parade say about the other one?

2. Crucifixion was the ultimate "nobody death." It was humiliating, brutal, and reserved for the least of these. What does Jesus' willingness to die in that way say about his mission and ministry?

3. While one thief mocked Jesus, the other one honored Jesus and then asked Jesus to "remember him" when he got to heaven. What was Jesus' response? What does that say to us about who receives eternal life?

4. What does it mean to be forgiven?

5. Some people say we are called to forgive and forget. What is your response to that idea?

April 17, 2022: The Women at the Tomb

Key Scriptures: Luke 24:1-12

While women were among the most marginalized members of society at the time Jesus lived, God chose them to be the first witnesses of the resurrection and to be the first to proclaim it had taken place. What they saw and what they said has forever changed the world. Join us for a special Easter celebration as we rejoice in the Good News they proclaimed, "Christ is risen!"

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Luke 24:1-12. As you read this story, what images come to mind? What questions does it provoke? What hope does it give you?

2. At the time Jesus lived, women were among the most marginalized of society. Josephus, a first-century scholar, wrote the following: "The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for the authority has been given by God to man." Given that reality, consider the following:
    a. What does it say that God chose to reveal the resurrection to women?
    b. What does it say that women were the first people to proclaim that the resurrection happened?

3. According to the Gospel of Luke, the story of Jesus is bookended by stories about women. At the beginning, Mary becomes the first person to whom the birth of Christ is announced. At the end, the women become the first to witness the resurrection. How does that impact the way we read this Gospel?

4. How should the modern church should embrace and include women in every aspect of our mission and ministry?

5. In the message, heaven is described as a place of perfect paradise. While we can't know what that is like until we get there, most of us have places on earth that are so special to us they feel like paradise. What is one of those places for you? Why is it special?