Community Group Material

Matthew 14:13-36

Week of 11th to 17th of February 2024

KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Compassion and Calm

Read pages 8-10 of the CG leader notes. Prepare by looking through the notes –choose to focus in depth on some topics, and omit others according to the needs of your group.

This week marks the start of Lent for those who observe it. We can enter a season of spiritual preparation as we anticipate our commemoration of Jesus' sacrifice at Easter time.

The stories leading up to Jesus' discussion of his death focus on two things:

- Jesus encouraging the disciples to grow in their understanding and faith.
- exposing those who oppose and are offended by Jesus,

May we use this time to lean on Jesus to grow us as disciples, and to prepare for any opposition we may face as we live out our faith.

Since Tuesday is Shrove Tuesday, how about making and sharing pancakes as a group this week? If you don't feel comfortable cooking them, why not ask someone in the group who might be able to. It's great to give other group members an opportunity to use their gifts!

SIMPLE PANCAKE RECIPE

2 cups flour
2 cups water
2 eggs

- Place the flour in a bowl.
- Measure the water into a jug, and crack the eggs into it. Mix them together.
- Make a well in the pile of flour, and add the water / egg mixture a bit at a time until it is all mixed in.
- Leave to stand for 30 minutes.
- Use a little oil in a pan to fry the pancakes. You may need to add a little water if the mixture is too thick.
- Serve hot with cinnamon and sugar / lemon juice / syrup / other toppings

(please note that your ability to complete this task does not necessarily qualify you as a red frog)

Pancake people

n. Internet users who read widely, but without depth.

I think we're producing a race of people who are paper-thin — almost **pancake people** — who cover a lot of territory. Like the Internet. And our psyches cover a lot of territory, but to me it's sort of pancake-thin.

—Richard Foreman, quoted in Nick Fracaro, " Richard Foreman Interview: http://ratconference.com/foreman/Rat%20Sass%20Richard%20Foreman%20Interview.htm," *Rat Sass*, February 7, 2003

The more different ways technology gives people to multi-task, the more chances people have to succumb to an illusion of attention...

Pancake people spread wide and thin.

—Thomas Crampton, "Debate Research: The Internet is Making Us Stupid," *Thomas Crampton*, November 10, 2010

Many of us can identify with the kind of availability and overload of information that turns us into "pancake people":

- Are you someone who looks up everything on the internet?
- Do you prefer to gather small pieces of information about many things, or study one thing in depth?
- Does this apply to the way you access information about Jesus?
- How can we make sure that our faith doesn't stay "pancake thin"?

Compassion and Calm

READ Matthew 14:13-36

Compassion

- Why do you think Jesus was "withdrawing to a solitary place"? Think of at least three reasons!

- What times make you want to withdraw from people? How does this strengthen your faith? Are there ways that you (or other people) may withdraw that are not healthy, or harm your faith?

- How do you feel when you have chosen to step away from the busyness of life, and the demands of people, work, or the world intrude on your quietness? Can you share about a time when that happened and how you reacted?

- Countercultural: Would Jesus have been entitled to respond to people's needs with one of these comments? Are these explanations we might use when not wanting to be "interrupted"?
  - I have to maintain my *boundaries*
  - Self-care is the most important thing
  - You can't pour out of an empty vessel

Each of these statements contains elements of truth, but may also be tainted by the surrounding secular worldview. We really need Godly wisdom to know how to respond – when to withdraw, and when to step out in faith.

- Looking at verse 15, how did the disciples react to the needs of the people?
  - Were they being practical?
  - Were they showing compassion?
  - Were they showing faith?

- How did Jesus react to the needs of the people? What do you think Jesus wanted the disciples to learn from this experience?

- Read 1 Corinthians 12: 25-27
  - The word "compassion" literally means "*to suffer along with*"
  - How do these verses give you a picture of how we as Christians should show compassion?

- How can you as a group be involved in Jesus' mission of extending compassion to the world around you? How would this require FAITH? Sometimes committing in advance to the response you want to have to a particular interruption makes it easier to act that way when it happens! Think about a situation and rehearse out loud how you would like to respond: how you would speak and act.

Calm

- After the crowds had left, Jesus again took time to be alone. Do you think he regretted the previous interruption?

- Look back to Matthew 8: 25-27.

Matthew 8:25–27	Matthew 14:25–27, 33	Matthew 14:28–31
The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"	When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.	"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." . . . But when he saw the wind, he was afraid. . .
He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.	But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."	"Come," he said . . . Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"
The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"	Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God".	. . . beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

- What examples of growing faith do you see in the disciples in these passages?

- How does Jesus respond to the disciples? What does he hope they would see in him?

Worship

Just as the disciples recognized that Jesus was AMAZING, the SON OF GOD, and LORD, take time in your group to acknowledge Jesus in worship in your group.

Read Psalm 77:11-20 as a reminder of God's active involvement in the world. Then spend some time praising him for who he is.

You might like to play or sing "A Thousand Hallelujahs" by Brooke Ligertwood to direct your thoughts.

[https://open.spotify.com/track/3iJpkw9KKdzMNZQVrdRzsl?si=qcV5tPWFRsG37FDisVzqrA]

The natural progression from worship is to move towards a faith response – to place our trust in Jesus and obey him. As a group, ask Jesus to help you not to be afraid, and to trust him to work in situations that seem impossible to resolve from a human point of view.

