

# **Good Call!**

## **Called to be Mulberry Free**

### **October 2, 2022**

**Overarching Theme:** 2022 – The Year of the Lord’s Favor (Luke 4:19)

#### **Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

#### **Core Point:**

As the world awakens from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “*the year of the Lord’s favor*” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new possibilities with God this year and always.

#### **Reflect on this Scripture: Luke 17:1-6**

*Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> said to his disciples, “Occasions for stumbling<sup>l</sup> are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! <sup>2</sup> It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble <sup>3</sup> Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. <sup>4</sup> And if the same person sins against you seven times a day and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.”<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” <sup>6</sup> The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a<sup>[d]</sup> mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.*

#### **Commentary:**

In order for a man to have a millstone “around his neck,” his head would have to stick through the hole in the upper stone – a ludicrous and comic image if that is what is meant. Alternatively, and less literally, the stone would have to be tied to one’s neck, as is apparently the meaning in Matthew. Either way, the analogy is graphic and effective: There can be no escape from the consequences of blocking, discouraging, or hindering another person’s response to God’s call. The “little ones” (mikros) are not defined in this context, but the term probably refers to any person struggling to respond to Jesus’ teachings who might be turned aside from this intent by the misguided example or words of a disciple.

This pronouncement, therefore, dramatizes the believer's responsibility for the influence of his or her actions and words on others, especially those weaker in faith or those who are looking to the example of the believer as they consider their own response to Jesus.

One of the ways a disciple can help or hinder another relationally is in how conflict is handled (or mishandled). Jesus urges a very proactive approach in correcting the sin of another and then practicing (again and again) the art of lavish forgiveness. When the disciples protest that they do not have enough faith to forgive this much, Jesus tells them that even a small step of faith is capable of uprooting a mulberry tree, and thus avoiding the messy fruit of bitterness and relational chaos.

- Adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol IX, p. 321-322

### **Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:**

1. Human relationships are rewarding but complicated. Why do you think relationships are so important to Jesus?
2. Why do you think Jesus uses such an extreme, exaggerated image (of a millstone around the neck) when warning his disciples about the dangers of causing a little one to stumble? Who do you think the "little ones" refer to?
3. Why would Jesus recommend such a direct approach to resolving conflict ("If another disciples sins, rebuke...")? What would be wrong with avoiding conflict altogether?
4. Revenge may be sweet, but like a ripe mulberry, it can spoil quickly. Instead of seeking revenge when wronged, Jesus commanded his followers to practice forgiveness (seven times a day in Luke's rendering!). Can you relate to the disciple's statement, "*Increase our faith*"? Is there a mulberry tree in your life that needs to be uprooted by faith?

### **Activity for the Life of a Disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Luke 17:3-4<sup>3</sup> *Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.* <sup>4</sup> *And if the same person sins against you seven times a day and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive."*