

The Great Reversal: Rooted & Grounded in Love

Pastor Hannah Souter

Big idea: Lent helps our roots grow deep in God's love for us

Purpose: To help people connect with God's heart for them this Lent

Passage: Luke 9:22-36

Movement 1: Opening

Good morning, everyone! My name is Hannah and I'm one of the pastors here at New Hope. We've got a special service for you this morning. Today is one of our experiential services. Every month or so, we mix things up a bit and instead of doing a standard service with worship and teaching, we create a space for you to engage with your whole self — your mind, your spirit, your emotions, and your body.

We all have different learning styles. These types of services may totally connect with you, and they might not! That's okay. It's all invitational. You don't have to participate in anything you don't want to, but I do encourage you to find your "stretch zone" — where it pushes you just a little bit into something new, where you might encounter yourself and God in a new way.

Today we are continuing in our sermon series on Luke's Gospel. A big theme in Luke is what Justo Gonzales calls "*The Great Reversal*" — where Luke shows us how Jesus turns things upside down and inside out. The ways of the world are not the ways of God. God's Kingdom plays by completely different rules. We're going to see that once again today. Let's start by reading the passage we're looking at today. Turn with me, or scroll with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 9. We'll be starting in verse 22.

This might be a familiar passage to you. When I realized I'd be teaching on this, I was kind of intimidated. This passage has often been used in the church in harmful and manipulative ways. It has been used to silence & diminish & exploit people. If that has been the case for you, it can be easy to see passages like this and think, "*Nope, not going there again.*"

What I invite you to do today is to stick with it. To let whatever emotions come up for you come up. **Ask the Spirit of God to shine some light on those places of pain—to bring healing and new insight.** That was my prayer as I was working through this text...to get underneath the baggage and the reactivity in my heart long enough to hear God's heart and the healing truths in Jesus' words. I'm hopeful we will create space this morning to do just that.

Movement 2: Public Reading of Scripture

And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.

As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen. (Luke 9:22-36)

Movement 3: Framing/Commentary

In a minute or two, some members from our Prayer Team are going to lead us through this text again with an imaginative exercise. Before they do, I want to frame it up a little bit and highlight a few things for you to pay attention to.

I want you to notice the Great Reversal themes that come up in this text...there are lots of contrasting and counter-intuitive images and ideas and connections:

Great Reversal Themes

- That from *Death* comes *Life*
- From *Suffering* comes *Raising Up*
- There's a connection between *Rejection & Affirmation*
- There are *Authority Figures* who seek power & control and there are *Disciple-Followers* who give up power and control
- It's in *Losing* that we *Save*
- In *Gaining* there is also *Forfeiting*
- Out of *Shame* comes *Glory*
- There is a contrast between being *Asleep* & being *Awake*

I want you to get curious about some of these themes as you engage in the exercise. What are Jesus and Luke trying to communicate here about who God is? About who we are? About what God's Kingdom is like? Our Prayer Pastor, Jess, will also have some reflection prompts as you go through this text to help you process and imagine.

Movement 5: Imaginative Prayer

Jess: Thanks Hannah, I'm Jess, Prayer Pastor in Residence, and I am here with April Pryzbek and John Aman, two of our Prayer Team members. This morning we are going to lead you through a practice of prayer called *Imaginative Prayer*. This prayer practice was developed by a church father named Ignatius of Loyola in the 1500's. It is also known as a *Lectio Divina*, meaning *divine word*. This practice brings together scripture and prayer in a way that brings the story to life. April, would you share a little about Imaginative Prayer?

April: Imaginative prayer is meeting God through stories in scripture. The prayer develops as you "live into" the passage with all your senses and imagination. You become a participant in the story, and you continue in the story in your heart, mind, imagination, spirit, and body.

Jess: Yes, it is a great practice because you let the Holy Spirit guide the prayer - you don't force anything to happen - you get to relax and let God speak to you through the story. It may take more practice than just what we are practicing today. Feel free to continue to practice Imaginative Prayer at home to allow more space for God to be present to you in the story.

We will be reading Luke 9:22-36 two more times—once by John and the second time by April. Before each reading, I will give you prompts to focus on as you are listening to the scripture reading. After the reading, we will give space for you to reflect on what you noticed in the passage.



In this first reading, listen for the details:

- Who are the major players?
- Who else is there?
- What are they doing?
- How do they interact?
- What is the setting like?
- What time of day is it?
- What is the mood or the atmosphere?

You can close your eyes and listen to this story.
(John reads the passage)

Jess: In this second and last reading, notice more detail and begin to feel yourself in that place, in that story:

- Do you identify with an individual in the story, or are you just in the crowd listening and watching from a distance?
- What are you doing, thinking, or feeling?
- What are the sounds, the smells, and the other details about the location that you notice?
- What are the emotions and the undertones that you notice?



April reads the passage & 30-second pause

Movement 6: I'm not trying to rob you!

This call from Jesus is about cultivating wholeheartedness...an ongoing, wholehearted trust in God's ways in our lives, in God's ways *through* our lives for the sake of the world. It is a call to trust that God's ways are good. That God's ways are *FOR US*. That God's ways lead to the Life that is truly Life.

Have any of you seen *The Lord of The Rings*? Maybe a few of you? There's this scene with Gandalf and Bilbo Baggins in the first movie when Bilbo is about to leave the Shire.

Gandalf can see that the Ring has already started to corrupt Bilbo and he is trying to get Bilbo to surrender it:

"I think you should leave the ring behind," Gandalf says. "Is that so hard?"

Bilbo replies, *"Well no! ...and yes."* (Relatable anyone?)

Bilbo gets defensive and suspicious and accuses Gandalf of wanting the Ring for himself and the mood in the room totally changes. The scene gets dark and Gandalf gets big and says, *"Bilbo Baggins! Do not take me for some conjurer of cheap tricks! I am not trying to rob you!"* And then the scene becomes more gentle again, lighter, and Gandalf comes lower and says tenderly, *"I'm trying to help you."*

Can anyone else connect with that image? I can become so afraid that God is trying to rob me, when in fact, God is trying to help me. There are things that I carry which do not serve me. There are things that I carry which do not bring out the best in me. There are things that I carry which corrupt my true self—the Image of God in me. God is not trying to rob me. God is trying to help me.

And that's exactly what Lent is about.

Movement 7: What is Lent & How Can I Participate?

We've practiced Lent here at New Hope for a few years now. The Church globally has been practicing the season of Lent since the 4th century, so, for about 17 hundred years. And while church tradition can grow stale and feel kind of empty or performative, church tradition can also reconnect us to these beautiful, ancient pathways of relating to God and the family of God, beyond our particular time and space.

Lent is part of the Church Calendar. **The Church Calendar has seasons and special days that help followers of Jesus globally remember and reconnect to the story of God.** We celebrate some of those—like Easter and Christmas—but there are all sorts of things in the Church Calendar that are often overlooked, particularly in Protestant, evangelical churches like ours.

Some of you may have come from a liturgical or Catholic church tradition, and perhaps you are all too familiar with the Church Calendar. Maybe you loved it, or maybe it left a bad taste in your mouth because it had grown stale for you. My hope today is to help us lean in—perhaps in a new way—and to discover the gifts that the season of Lent can hold.

Lent patterns itself after Israel's 40-year and Jesus' 40-day desert experience. Lent prepares us to celebrate Easter. It begins on what's called Ash Wednesday and lasts for

40 days (excluding Sundays), leading to Easter. This year, Lent begins on Wednesday, March 2—that's just a few days away!

Traditionally, Lent is marked by 3 things: *Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving*.

These three practices ultimately give us the opportunity to *strip away distractions, to disconnect from our lesser identities and strivings, and to return to our most basic identity as Beloved of God*.

I want to invite you to participate in the season of Lent this year. You can do something on your own, but here are a few opportunities with New Hope:

First, this Wednesday, the sanctuary will be open from 9-10am and 6-7pm for an **Ash Wednesday experience**. We will have some pastors present to pray with you if you'd like, or you can just go through a self-guided prayer exhibit to learn more about Ash Wednesday and Lent and to explore what you might fast from in this season. You will also receive a daily scripture reading guide for the season.

Second, on Tuesday, March 8, we will be starting a **5 week prayer course called *Unanswered Prayer***, exploring the challenges and tough questions surrounding prayer that even Jesus experienced. Jess and I will be leading that. It will be on Tuesdays throughout Lent from 7-8:30pm and there will be online and in-person options.

In all honesty, there is a bit of mystery to Lent. Jesus approached mystery through parables and pictures, so I'm going to give us a picture as well :)

In the rainy season (which is most of the year in Portland) when water is abundant, plants and trees don't have to dig their roots very deep. They can get just about everything they need from the surface soil. But in the dry seasons, or in a season of drought, **the roots of creation are forced to go deep**, to look for the nourishment and the water table beneath the soil. And with deep roots, these plants grow hearty and sturdy, able to withstand the future droughts and storms.

The choice to give something up for Lent, to say no to something, **forces our roots to go deep**. When we let go of something for a season, we will feel the lack. Without the go-to comforts, without the quick self-soothing, without our numbing behavior of choice, without our false securities—we find ourselves in the real work of deepening our roots, of returning to and strengthening in our most basic identity as Beloved of God.

We say *no* in order to say *yes* to God — to God's Kingdom, God's values, God's love, God's ways. **It's in this YES, that we reconnect with the glory of who we really are: Beloved. In Christ. Already enough.**

Movement 9: Reflection & Propagating Activity

We're going to take a few minutes now to process all this. Here's that experiential stuff I was talking about — know that this is all invitational and there are multiple ways to participate.

1. The worship team is going to come up and play a song that I think gets at the heart of what Lent is all about. You can just sit and let that song kind of wash over you.
2. There will be some reflection questions on the screen to help you discern what you might say *NO* to this Lent, in order to say *YES* to our identity as Beloved. You can stay in your pew and process with God through those questions.

What gets in the way of knowing you are wildly, creatively, joyfully loved by God?

- *What old narratives and stories?*
- *What actions & distractions?*
- *What fears & strivings?*
- *What do you turn to on the surface that keeps you from deepening your roots in your most basic identity as Beloved of God?*

3. There are also tables throughout the auditorium with an activity to help you connect with that imagery of our roots growing deep through Lent. All the supplies are there for you to take a cutting from the plants at each table and to propagate it in water. As you journey through Lent this year, you will see the roots growing on your plant as a reminder of your roots growing deep in your identity as God's Beloved.

There are also helpers at each table to walk you through what to do in case that sounds super intimidating.



I want to begin this time by praying over you Paul's prayer for the Ephesians:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
(Ephesians 3: 14-21)

Movement 10: Communion

As we Journey Through Lent, we don't journey alone. We have our **community**, both here at New Hope and across the globe. But even more, ***we journey with Jesus***. The author of Hebrews 12 encourages us:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

We cannot use our own willpower or striving or strength to practice Lent. We cannot be transformed into freedom by trying harder. The transformation we seek comes through surrender—surrender to the One who loves us and gave Himself up for us. **May we keep looking to Jesus this Lent.** May we be strengthened by His hope, His joy, His life. He knows the Way.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and after he had given thanks, he broke it and said: This is my body, broken for you. Whenever you eat this, remember me. And in the same way he took the cup and said: This is the sign of the new covenant, my blood shed for you. Drink this in remembrance of me. You can participate in communion when you're ready.

Movement 11: Benediction

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)