New to the role of facilitator? Here are a few tips to help you get started.

• First of all, a facilitator’s job is to coordinate the flow of each session. View the video segment ahead of time and make your own notes and observations.

• Prepare the meeting place so that it is comfortable. Arrive early; help organize any refreshments and test your video player/computer.

• Getting to know one another helps the discussions flow. Welcome all, catch up and reflect a bit on last week’s session in the first few minutes.

• You don’t have to be the expert. You are not expected to provide answers to questions provided. So let the questions ignite the conversation and see where it takes the group.

• It’s everyone’s responsibility to make sure everyone else gets an equal amount of time to talk.

• Listen first; evaluate later. Make sure you understand a comment, then ask questions or pose other options.

• Encourage participants to bring a Bible or other resources.

• If you feel so moved, start, and/or end your session in prayer.

“R U Kidding”

Jesus states that unless you become like a child you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. In this series, we’ll look at Jesus’ parables through the eyes of children, discovering a surprising wisdom in them that adults frequently miss … until they become like children.

Welcome to the Darkwood Brew journey!

We are glad you can join us. Our primary resources for small group study are condensed versions of Darkwood Brew’s weekly one-hour episodes. These are called GUIDED EPISODES. Each Guided Episode is 25-30 minutes in length. There are pause points with questions provided for each Episode, intended for group discussion or individual reflection.

On the following page, you will find information on the Series Topic, Skype Guests, Scripture passage, and Questions posed during the episode.

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EPISODE TITLE: “Become Like a Child”

Featured Guest: Dr. Eric Elnes

Dr. Eric Elnes is a biblical scholar with a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from Princeton Theological Seminary. He is also a leading articulator of Convergence Christianity and Senior Minister of Countryside Community Church (UCC) in Omaha, NE. Eric has written several books on faith, theology and culture including, The Phoenix Affirmations: A New Vision for the Future of Christianity (Jossey-Bass, 2006) and a book on experiential worship called Igniting Worship: The Seven Deadly Sins (Abingdon, 2004). In 2006, Eric also helped lead a 2,500 mile walk from Phoenix to Washington, DC, to promote awareness of progressive/emerging Christian faith and practice and meet with Christians at a grassroots to hear their hopes and dreams for the future of faith in America. His journey, which is the subject of a feature-length film, The Asphalt Gospel, is recounted in his book, Asphalt Jesus: Finding a New Christian Faith on the Highways of America (Jossey-Bass, 2007). Elnes lives as an “empty nester” in Omaha with his wife, Melanie, dog Roe, and cat Tamar. They have two college-age daughters, Arianna and Maren.

Questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus put such an emphasis on humility and being like a child?

2. Is the recommendation Jesus gives for handling conflict by approaching a person individually first good advice? Why or why not? Do you have experience where this approach worked well, or where it didn’t?

3. In dealing with conflicts and relationships, what is the difference between being like a child and acting childish? How might either approach affect the outcome?

Thorny Theological Question:

What is the difference between becoming like a child and acting childish?

Matthew 18:1-5, 15-21

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ 2He called a child, whom he put among them, 3and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

15 ‘If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. 18Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’

21 Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’

Questions:

1. What is your initial reaction to this story? Does it seem fair? How important to you are fairness and equity?

2. What are some possible reasons some of the workers in the story ended up being picked last? What does it feel like not to be picked?

3. What does the audacious claim of Jesus that the last will be first and the first will be last tell us about our own dignity and worth, and that of our brothers and sisters?

Thorny Theological Question:

What does it feel like not to be picked?

Pneuma Divina Scripture:  Matthew 20:1-16

1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. 2After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. 5When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” 7They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” 8When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” 9When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” 13But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” 16So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’
EPISODE TITLE: “The Invitation”

R U Kidding?, Episode 3

Featured Guest: Bruce Van Blair

Bruce’s interests keep him going in several different directions including the start up of a new house church (now streamed live from our Countryside Chapel), and most recently joining the Countryside community to begin our new ministry “Converging Paths;” a partnership venture with the BTS Center in Bangor Maine, exploring our vocational callings in our everyday workplaces, and our leadership in faith communities. Bruce has written a wide collection of sermons as well as several books, including The Believer’s Road, and In A Nutshell.

Pneuma Divina Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14

1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.” 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 ‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Questions:

1. Many people find this to be a challenging parable. Why do you thank that might be? What first impressions do you have? What else do you think might be going on in the story?

2. If Jesus’ message in this parable has something to do with inviting his present audience into the experience of the Kingdom and their response to that invitation, how do you think it might have been received at the time? How might it be received today?

3. What forces, ideas or emotions might prevent you from accepting your invitation to participate fully in God’s Kingdom? What might convince you to accept the invitation?

Thorny Theological Question:

What would keep you from going to a party?
Questions:

1. What stands out for you in this parable? Who do you think the oil represents? Why couldn’t the wise bridesmaids share their oil the foolish ones?

2. What is the oil that fuels your lamp? What unique quality is God calling you to bring to the banquet? What steps might you take to get ready?

3. Chris, Eric and Melvin presented several possibilities for understanding this parable. Which of them resonate with you and why?

Thorny Theological Question:

Some things cannot be shared, even if we want to. What are those things?

Pneuma Divina Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

1 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." 7Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” 9But the wise replied, “No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.” 10And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” 12But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” 13Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.


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Who is the flock?

Thorny Theological Question:

Who is the flock?

Questions:

1. What are some examples of soul injuries? How might being like a child help heal those injuries?

2. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, members of both flocks are initially unaware that their actions towards others are experienced as actions towards God. How might this knowledge transform them and affect their motivations?

3. Deborah shared the story of the church flock that helped her younger sister in the six months leading up to her death. Where do you see concrete examples of that "sheep" energy in the world today? How might we encourage it in our own lives?

Featured Guest: Deborah Grassman

Deborah Grassman is CEO of Opus Peace, a Non-Profit Organization dedicated to “Unmourned grief and unforgiven guilt: Healing the trauma of soul injury.” For nearly 30 years, she was the Director of the Hospice program at Bay Pines VA in St. Petersburg, Florida and personally took care of 10,000 dying veterans. She now provides education and consultation throughout the country. Deborah’s work is lauded by the National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO): “Deborah’s work has dramatically and almost singlehandedly increased awareness of Veterans and their unique end-of-life issues. Additionally, her insights into the family’s experience offers perspectives for understanding how these experiences can impact and complicate grief and bereavement.” Her book, The Hero Within: Redeeming the Destiny We Were Born to Fulfill describes the processes of abiding, reckoning, and beholding our interior hero.

Pneuma Divina Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

31 ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” 37Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” 40And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” 44Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” 45Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’
EPISODE TITLE: “Mind your manners?”

Featured Guest: Scott Frederickson
I am a pastor, teacher, educator, who likes to read and talk and live theology. I am actively searching for ways to live missionally and participate in the life and being of the Triune God. I look forward to conversations which challenge and engage the ideas I present, and although I think they are pretty good…everything can be improved (well,…except maybe heaven.) I have an MDiv from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and a PhD in Systematic Theology from Luther Seminary, St.Paul, MN.

Pneuma Divina Scripture: Matthew 21:1-16
1 'When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' 4This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 5 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' 6The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' 10When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' 11The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.' 12 Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers.' 14 The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. 15But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry 16and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself"?'

Questions:
1. What personality characteristics of Jesus are evident in this story? Why do you think he did these things in full view of religious and civil authorities?
2. Does the story of Palm Sunday help you experience the presence and person of Jesus? Why or why not? If it does, in what ways do you feel them?
3. Eric suggests that the Palm Sunday story is a call to action in Jesus’ day, and in our own. Do you feel a call? If so, where is it encouraging you to act?

Thorny Theological Question:
Would you crown this guy (Jesus) King?
EPISODE TITLE: “What if Easter is true?”

Featured Guest: Dr. Eric Elnes
Dr. Eric Elnes is a biblical scholar with a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from Princeton Theological Seminary. He is also a leading articulator of Convergence Christianity and Senior Minister of Countryside Community Church (UCC) in Omaha, NE. Eric has written several books on faith, theology and culture including, The Phoenix Affirmations: A New Vision for the Future of Christianity (Jossey-Bass, 2006) and a book on experiential worship called Igniting Worship: The Seven Deadly Sins (Abingdon, 2004). In 2006, Eric also helped lead a 2,500 mile walk from Phoenix to Washington, DC, to promote awareness of progressive/emerging Christian faith and practice and meet with Christians at a grassroots to hear their hopes and dreams for the future of faith in America. His journey, which is the subject of a feature-length film, The Asphalt Gospel, is recounted in his book, Asphalt Jesus: Finding a New Christian Faith on the Highways of America (Jossey-Bass, 2007). Elnes lives as an “empty nester” in Omaha with his wife, Melanie, dog Roe, and cat Tamar. They have two college-age daughters, Arianna and Maren.

R U Kidding?, Episode 7

Questions:

1. What does the story of Easter mean if it turns out to be true? How would we know if it is true?

2. Do you have lived experience of death and resurrection? If so, how does that experience inform your understanding of the Easter story?

3. Eric suggests the lived experience of resurrection is reflected in the Psalm 23. Where else in life or in scripture do you see reflections of resurrection? What is resurrection calling you to do or to be?

Thorny Theological Question:

Easter: What if it’s true? And how would we know?

Pneuma Divina Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7Then go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” This is my message for you.’ 8So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” This is my message for you. 9Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’