

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 14 April 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 105:1-3

Opening Hymn: 280 Wondrous King, All-Glorious

Confession of Sin

Most holy and merciful Father; We acknowledge and confess before You; Our sinful nature prone to evil and slothful in good; And all our shortcomings and offenses. You alone know how often we have sinned; In wandering from Your ways; In wasting Your gifts; In forgetting Your love. But You, O Lord, have pity upon us; Who are ashamed and sorry for all wherein we have displeased You. Teach us to hate our errors; Cleanse us from our secret faults; And forgive our sins for the sake of Your dear Son. And O most holy and loving Father; Help us we beseech You; To live in Your light and walk in Your ways; According to the commandments of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Psalm 6:23

Psalm of Preparation: 119A How Blessed Are Those Upright in Their Way

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 119:1-8

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 16:5-12

Sermon: *Beware the Leaven!*

Psalm of Response: 28 To You, O LORD, I Cry (1-4)

Confession of Faith: Q/A 1 Heidelberg Catechism (p. 872)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Psalm: 28 To You, O LORD, I Cry (5-8)

PM Worship

247 We Praise You, O God, Our Redeemer, Creator

243 How Firm a Foundation

244 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 41:8-13

New Covenant Reading: Philippians 1:27-30

Sermon Title: Standing Firm

Adult Sunday School: Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 33

Lord's Day 33

**Q. What is involved
in genuine repentance or conversion?**

A. Two things:
the dying-away of the old self,
and the rising-to-life of the new.

Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

A. To be genuinely sorry for sin
and more and more to hate
and run away from it.

Q. What is the rising-to-life of the new self?

A. Wholehearted joy in God through Christ¹

and a love and delight to live
according to the will of God
by doing every kind of good work.

Q. But what are good works?

A. Only those which
are done out of true faith,
conform to God's law,
and are done for his glory;
and not those based
on our own opinion
or human tradition.

Suggested Preparations

Monday (4/8) Read and discuss Matthew 16:5-12

When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

We readers who stand outside the story may imagine that the disciples should have readily grasped what Jesus was trying to do, since it may seem obvious to us. The disciples are, in some sense, concerned because they forgot to bring physical bread. Jesus wants to make them think, and so he communicates indirectly. Are the disciples aware of just how dangerous the opposition of the Pharisees and Sadducees will become? They likely are not aware. Jesus, then, calls the Jewish leaders' united front against himself

“leaven,” something small that can grow and have a great and damning effect. Beware, O disciples, of this leaven!

The disciples, however, completely misunderstand, and Jesus expresses his frustration with them. They are discussing the need for physical food, something that should not concern them at all. Did not Jesus, twice in their recent memory, solve such a problem for thousands of people? How could they possibly think that he was talking about literal bread? They’re supposed to get it! He wants them to get it! After this scolding, Jesus repeats his indirect and partially hidden warning: “Beware indeed of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees!” Just as Jesus also taught his own disciples (as well as the crowds) in parables in chapter 13, here he again wants them to ponder his words with ears that can hear. The second time around, Matthew tells his hearers/readers that the disciples do understand: Jesus is talking about the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Read or sing 280 Wondrous King, All-Glorious

Tuesday (4/9) Read and discuss Matthew 15:39-6:4

And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed. (ESV)

Let’s remind ourselves that the signs Jesus performed were not a few small miracles done way over there in the corner. When Nicodemus, one of the most prominent teachers in all of Israel, came to Jesus by night, he didn’t just come out of idle curiosity. Nicodemus declared:

“Rabbi, we **know** that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

Who are the “we” that Nicodemus is talking about? Well, Nicodemus was a Pharisee ... and a member of the Sanhedrin. With that in mind, listen to his testimony once again:

“Rabbi, we **know** that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

Now, some calloused Pharisees and Sadducees ... are standing in front of Jesus demanding that He authenticate His ministry for them by performing some dramatic sign on their command.

Their problem was not that they lacked education or familiarity with what Jesus had been doing. Their problem was that they were unfaithful to God as they pursued their own worldly agendas. Isn't that precisely what Jesus says?

Look at the beginning of verse 4 with me. Jesus says:

An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.

Whenever people in general, or religious leaders in particular, seek to put God in the dock demanding that He fit into our agendas and our boxes that is evil and adulterous behavior. This was true in the first century. It is true in ours as well.

Read or sing Psalm 119A How Blessed Are Those Upright in Their Way

Wednesday (4/10) Read and discuss Psalm 119:1-8

Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
 who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
 who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong,
 but walk in his ways!
You have commanded your precepts
 to be kept diligently.
Oh that my ways may be steadfast
 in keeping your statutes!
Then I shall not be put to shame,
 having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
I will praise you with an upright heart,
 when I learn your righteous rules.
I will keep your statutes;
 do not utterly forsake me! (ESV)

Allen P. Ross writes:

This first stanza of the series of meditations that make up Psalm 119 sets the pattern and tone for the entire collection: in the midst of some serious difficulty or dilemma, the psalmist knows that the blessing of God is with the faithful, and so he determines to keep the commandments of God, anticipating that he will have reason to praise the LORD for his protective care. We may word this in the form of an expository idea: *Because of the revelation that God's blessing is with those who devout, the faithful will commit themselves to obey his word, anticipating that they will praise him when he blesses them with his protective care.*

The themes in this first stanza will appear frequently throughout the entire psalm: but they are timeless truths. James instructs us with these words: "Do

not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says ... the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does” (1:22, 25).

Sing or Read Psalm 28 To You, O LORD, I Cry (1-4)

Thursday (4/11) Read and discuss Isaiah 41:8-13

But you, Israel, my servant,
 Jacob, whom I have chosen,
 the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
 and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,
 I have chosen you and not cast you off”;
fear not, for I am with you;
 be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
 I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Behold, all who are incensed against you
 shall be put to shame and confounded;
those who strive against you
 shall be as nothing and shall perish.
You shall seek those who contend with you,
 but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
 shall be as nothing at all.
For I, the LORD your God,
 hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, “Fear not,
 I am the one who helps you.” (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

Israel’s election goes back to Yahweh’s everlasting covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:1-21; 17:7, 13). This was not a covenant of works, but of righteousness through faith alone (Gen 15:6). All believers are justified by grace alone, apart from works. They are incorporated into this same Abrahamic covenant with the God of Israel through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Despite Israel’s failure to maintain the covenant of Moses, Isaiah could appeal to the ancient covenant of grace: “Indeed, Yahweh will have mercy

upon Jacob, and he will once again choose Israel. Israel is not merely Yahweh's acquaintance, his business partner, or his associates. Yahweh calls the Israelites his "treasured possession," "chosen people," "possession," and "servant."

Yahweh elected Israel with the intent that the covenant people would be in the mission to the world as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). At Sinai, the nation is commissioned to be his "go between," mediating between Yahweh and the nations. Israel was designed to be a model of what Yahweh desires for all people. In contrast to idolatrous nations like Egypt and Babylon, God's people were to be theologically and ethically different. The Torah presented the world with a religious revolution, which was propelled by the exodus Gospel and founded upon monotheism. The goal was to establish an egalitarian people (the priesthood of all believers) [Ex19:6] whose special concern was for the widow, the fatherless, and the alien.

Israel was not chosen to be Yahweh's light to the world because its people were more important, elite, or upright than those of other nations. Neither were the Israelites elected because they were more numerous, mighty, or powerful. Israel was chosen solely because Yahweh's gracious love. Election means "to be taken as God's bride, to be drafted as Yahweh's army, to be adopted as Yahweh's son, to be purchased as Yahweh's servant, to be planted as Yahweh's vineyard, to be acquired as Yahweh's sheep, to be formed as Yahweh's vessel, to be separated as Yahweh's special possession."

Friday (4/12) Read and discuss Philippians 1:27-30

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (ESV)

Few things unite a group of people as quickly as a common enemy. It is astonishing how quickly comradeship develops in Boot Camp among recruits who are being driven and harassed by the same Drill Sergeants. On a larger scale, nothing brings out a nation's patriotism like being attacked by a foreign power. Many people today probably forget how much opposition there was in the United States to our country entering World War II. President Roosevelt won re-election, in part, by promising to keep our troops out of the war. Yet all that changed after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. After that attack, one slogan answered all the critics: "Remember Pearl Harbor!" This may seem very removed

from today's text until we take a close look at Paul's unusual word choice. Paul tells the Philippians "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ ..." This may not strike us at all except that the normal way that the Hebrew Old Testament spoke of our "manner of life" is to use the word "walk". To this day Jewish people speak of the *Halakah* – which simply means the way that we are supposed to walk. But that is not the expression that Paul uses here. Instead, he uses the verbal equivalent of citizen. The NLT tries to bring this out by translating the passage, "But whatever happens to me, you must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, **as citizens of heaven.**" Paul isn't telling the Philippians to simply live with excellent morality, he is telling them to live in such a way that everyone can see that their ultimate loyalty (as citizens of heaven!) is to Jesus Christ. In the face of persecution, the Philippians are not to rally to the flag or to the Roman standards but to the cross – that they should "stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel." Because the United States has had a Christian veneer for a long time it has been easy for Christians to be less attached to their brothers and sisters in Christ and their particular local church than they should be. Those days seem to be moving into the past. If New England continues to become increasingly secular, we will need to become even more committed to standing with resolve together for the truth once and for all delivered to the saints. Paul told the Philippians that "it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him." Will this be granted to us as well? Only God knows the answer to that question. Yet there are two things that we know for certain. (1) First, no one has ever been too committed to Jesus Christ; and (2) Second, "whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame (Romans 9:33)."

Read or sing Psalm 28 To You, O LORD, I Cry (5-8)

Saturday (4/13) Read and discuss Matthew 16:5-12

When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

Given what we know about the differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees in early Judaism, what does Jesus mean by referring to their common "teaching"? Jesus is not warning the disciples in general about Jewish oral tradition or about the way the religious leaders interpret this Scripture passage or that one. The two groups appeared together in 16:1-4 because they were agreed in wanting to tempt Jesus, to trap him. This,

specifically, is their teaching that is the deadly leaven that could spread and destroy everything: it is their view of Jesus.

With this warning ringing in their ears, the disciples will follow Jesus as he moves into the parts of Caesarea Philippi. He himself will question his disciples about what matters more than anything: Who is the Son of Man? After asking the disciples what other people are saying about him, he will subject his own disciples to that same question, as the Gospel's middle section comes to its important end.

This remains the central question – also today – as the story of Jesus is told around the world and as God continues to extend his reigning deeds to men and women and children, that they too may believe and be saved. When the need comes to address and evaluate the teaching that is offered by a prominent figure or by a “community of faith,” the first and primary question is this: What do these people say about Jesus? Even if individuals or groups might have good things to say about other matters, this question will ever and always be in the forefront, and if the “Jesus” they offer is any other than the Savior who vicariously suffered, died, and rose again, then their teaching is an evil leaven that must be avoided at all costs.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.