Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 21 April 2024

AM Worship
Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-3
Opening Hymn: 371 Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise
Confession of Sin
Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
Assurance of Pardon: Psalm 103:17-18
Psalm of Preparation: 95A O Come before the LORD, Our King
Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 52:1-10
New Covenant Reading: Matthew 16:13-20
Sermon: *Christ & His Kingdom*
Hymn of Response: 284 Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim
Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)
Doxology (Hymn 568)
Diaconal Offering
Closing Hymn: 424 All Authority and Power

PM Worship
151 Lord of the Sabbath, Hear Us Pray
81A Sing Aloud to God Our Strength
479 Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting
Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 81
New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 4:1-13
Sermon Title: Would You But Listen

Adult Sunday School: Fellowship Lunch – No Sunday School

Suggested Preparations

Monday (4/15) Read and discuss Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in

heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (ESV)

Tom Wright comments:

> The disciples report the general reaction – which tells us a good deal about the way that Jesus was perceived by the people at large. Not 'gentle Jesus meek and mild'; not the cozy, comforting friend of little children; rather, like one of the wild prophets of recent or ancient times, who had stood up and spoken God's word fearlessly against wicked and rebellious kings. Jesus was acting as a prophet: not simply 'one who foretells the future,' but one who was God's mouthpiece against injustice and wickedness in high places.
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> But within that prophetic ministry there lay hidden another dimension, and Jesus believed – otherwise he would scarcely have asked the question – that his followers had grasped this secret. He was not just God's mouthpiece. He was God's Messiah. He was not just speaking God's word against the wicked rulers of the time. He was God's king, who would supplant them. That was indeed the conclusion they had reached, and Peter takes on the role of spokesman: 'You are the Messiah,' he says, 'the son of the living God.'
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> It's important to be clear that at this stage the phrase 'son of God' did not mean 'the second person of the Trinity.' There was no thought yet that the coming king would himself be divine – though some of the things Jesus was doing and saying must already have made the disciples very puzzled, with a perplexity that would only be resolved when, after his resurrection, they came to believe that he had all along been even more intimately associated with Israel's one God than they had ever imagined. No: the phrase 'son of God' was a biblical phrase, indicated that the king stood in a particular relation to God, adopted to be his special representative (see, for instance 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7).
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> Very soon after Jesus' resurrection, his followers came to believe that the same phrase had a whole other layer of meaning that nobody had hitherto imagined [e.g. Just one week after the resurrection, Thomas says to Jesus: "My Lord and my God" and he worshiped Him].But it's important, if we are to understand the present passage, that we don't read into it more than is there. What Peter and the others were saying was: you are the true king. You're the one Israel has been waiting for. You are God's adopted son, the one of whom the Psalms and the prophets had spoken.

Read or sing Hymn 371 Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise

Tuesday (4/16) 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)

Why did the Disciples jump from Jesus warning them about the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees to imagining that Jesus was rebuking them for forgetting to bring bread with them for the journey?

There is an obvious connection between leaven and bread but other than that there is nothing. And how in the world could they relate forgetting to bring bread with them to the Sadducees and the Pharisees? The misunderstanding of the Disciples appears to be silly or even rather foolish.

But before we become too judgmental, we should realize that we do something like this a lot more frequently than we would like to admit.

The disciples had discovered their mistake. They were discussing their failure to bring food amongst themselves probably with a mixture of finger pointing and embarrassment and they had become fixated on the problem. Do you ever do that? The answer for most of us is that we have done this more times in our lives than we wish to either remember or to admit.

Regrettably, once we start fixating on and agitating over a problem that problem becomes the lens through which we begin to see the rest of the world. Whenever new facts or ideas come our way we automatically try to relate them to the problem particularly if it is an embarrassing problem that we keep turning over and over again in our heads.

But God never intended us to fixate on our problems. Yes, we do need to tackle many of the challenges that come our way in life, but we are to do so with our eyes and our confidence fixed on Jesus Christ. Overly fixating on the challenges and problems of life leads to anxiety and it radically distorts our view of the world.

That is why the Disciples fall into this silly misunderstanding of what Jesus was saying. They were focused on their problem rather than being focused on Jesus.

This is the first thing that we need to take away from this passage: Jesus is calling us to fix our eyes and our hope upon Him rather than fixing them on our circumstances.

Read or sing Psalm 95A O Come before the LORD, Our King

Wednesday (4/17) Read and discuss Isaiah 52:1-10

Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;
for there shall no more come into you
the uncircumcised and the unclean.
Shake yourself from the dust and arise;
be seated, O Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion.

For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money." For thus says the Lord GOD: "My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. Now therefore what have I here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail," declares the LORD, "and continually all the day my name is despised. Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God. (ESV)

On the Fourth of July Americans celebrate Independence Day to commemorate when our nation first declared itself to be a sovereign power. Yet, even a cursory familiarity with history makes it difficult to paint the British Empire as tyrannical oppressors. Israel could only have wished that they had been "oppressed" in this way. Isaiah had lived through the assaults of the Assyrians, who were among the most brutal people who had ever lived. Then he prophesied of Judah being taken into the Babylonian captivity. While the Babylonians were more civilized than the Assyrians, they did force the majority of the Jewish people to move more than five hundred miles away to a strange land where they

would have to do whatever the king of Babylon told them to do. Yet, Isaiah 52 is promising a freedom from this bondage. More than mere freedom, Israel would be lifted up and exalted. Isaiah was promising a second Exodus where the people would be delivered not only to freedom and security but to being the LORD's true people:

> Therefore, my people shall know my name. Therefore, in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I."

When would this glorious event take place? If we stopped reading here we could easily imagine that this might take place in the fifth century B.C. when the LORD would bring Israel back into their land. But if we keep reading through Isaiah 52 and 53 we see that this freedom, security, and joy is intimately tied up with the substitutionary death of the Suffering Servant. It is only with Christ's victory over Satan, sin, and death that the Second Exodus is truly accomplished. Living on this side of redemption accomplished, let us lift our voices to sing of Christ's victory and let us rejoice in the Good News that He brings.

Sing or Read Hymn 284 Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim

Thursday (4/18) Read and discuss Psalm 81

> Sing aloud to God our strength;
> shout for joy to the God of Jacob!
> Raise a song; sound the tambourine,
> the sweet lyre with the harp.
> Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
> at the full moon, on our feast day.
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> For it is a statute for Israel,
> a rule of the God of Jacob.
> He made it a decree in Joseph
> when he went out over the land of Egypt.
> I hear a language I had not known:
> "I relieved your shoulder of the burden;
> your hands were freed from the basket.
> In distress you called, and I delivered you;
> I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
> I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah
> Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!
> O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
> There shall be no strange god among you;
> you shall not bow down to a foreign god.
> I am the LORD your God,
> who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
> Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

"But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,
to follow their own counsels.
Oh, that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes.
Those who hate the LORD would cringe toward him,
and their fate would last forever.
But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you." (ESV)

The most important thing you can do to rightly understand a Psalm is to read it over several times *out loud*. As you do that with Psalm 81 you will notice that there are two different moods contained within this Psalm. First, the Psalm begins with energy in an upbeat manner because God is so good. Verses 6-7 detail specific ways in which God has been good to Israel by delivering them both from Egypt and then from a lack of water. Yet the mood shifts in verse 8 to one of deep concern – even anguish. Critically, the perspective is no longer told from Israel's perspective but from God's. The LORD is weeping over the hardheartedness of His people. Throughout the rest of the Psalm the LORD is telling Israel that, if they would only turn back to Him, the LORD wishes to satisfy their every need. This is true of us as well.

Friday (4/19) Read and discuss Hebrews 4:1-13

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

"As I swore in my wrath,
'They shall not enter my rest,'"

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this passage he said,

"They shall not enter my rest."

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (ESV)

According to verses 2 and 3, why do some people who hear the good news not benefit from it while others do? Verse 6 says that some people didn't enter God's rest because of disobedience. What is the relationship between not having faith in verse 2 and disobedience in verse 6? A common error among contemporary American evangelicals is to water down *faith* to simply giving intellectual assent to the truthfulness of a proposition. In the New Testament, the word translated "believe", almost always carries the idea of "trusting". We can see this most clearly if we read Hebrews 4 in light of its immediate context. Hebrews 4 is providing a commentary on the meaning of Hebrews 3:6 "Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed **we hold fast our confidence** and our boasting in our hope." Entrance into God's rest is purely a gift – yet part of that gift is the Holy Spirit causing us to "hold fast our confidence". This is why Reformed Christians have traditionally spoken of "the perseverance of the saints" rather than "eternal security" (when we describe the Biblical reality that no one who is truly redeemed ever loses his or her salvation). "Eternal security" makes it sound like we have an eternal fire insurance policy that we can file away until disaster strikes. But the Bible doesn't describe *entering God's rest* as though we were to relax in a hot tub doing absolutely nothing. How does Hebrews 4:11 describe what our attitude should be about *entering God's rest*?

Read or sing Hymn 424 All Authority and Power

Saturday (4/20) Read and discuss Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (ESV)

Leon Morris writes:

> "On this rock I will build my church" is a saying that has caused endless controversy in the church's history. The big question is the meaning of *this rock*. Does it mean the man Peter? Or the faith Peter has just professed? Or is it the teaching of Jesus (as in 7:24)? Or Jesus himself? Each of the views has been argued passionately by some exegetes, often maintaining at the same time that other views can be espoused only by people who refuse to accept the plain meaning of the Greek. Clearly this is a place where we must tread carefully and keep in mind the possibility of interpreting the passage in ways other than the one that appeals to us.
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> Some scholars, especially from among the Roman Catholics, have insisted that Jesus is saying that Peter is the rock on which the whole church is to be built, and accordingly that only the church that can claim to be built on the apostle is the true church. But it is not easy to establish that the whole of the early church was built on the foundation of Peter, and what are we to say of the descendants of the non-Petrine churches? [i.e., the Apostle Paul specifically set out to plant churches in Gentile areas where there were not already any churches] … Are we to say that [communions which] understand this passage in a different way [that] they are no part of the true church? Moreover, the statement that the rock is Peter is true only as we keep in mind what the apostle has just said; it is not Peter simply as Peter but Peter who has confessed Jesus as the Messiah who is the church's foundation on whom the church is to be built. We must not sperate the man from the words he has just spoken. From the earliest times it has been recognized that Peter's faith is important for an understanding of the passage. Thus Chrysostom cites the words "upon this rock will I build my Church" and immediately goes on, "that is, on the faith of his confession." Any interpretation that minimizes the importance of the faith that found expression in Peter's words is to be rejected. Barclay puts it this way: Jesus "did not mean that the Church *depended* on Peter, as it depended on Himself, and on God the Rock, alone."

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