

**BIBLE STUDY
ON THE LECTIONARY**

January 31, 2018

Last Bible Study Class for this Series

February 13 Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Supper) – 6:15 pm to 7:15 pm

February 14 Ash Wednesday Services – 12:00 pm and 7:30 pm
Lunch – 11:15 am (Crossroads)
Dinner – 6:30 pm (Fellowship Hall)

Lenten Series on Forgiveness

February 21 A Working Definition of Forgiveness
February 28 Understanding God’s Forgiveness
March 7 Understanding What God Expects of Us
March 14 Forgiving the Sins of the World
March 21 Making the Decision to Love

Lessons for February 4 – The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 40:21-31

Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) offers hope and encouragement to the Judeans returning from exile. The prophet is poking around in the ashes of a long-dormant faith to find a small spark still left. Their questions surface:

Why should we go back? Did God abandon us?
How do we know God will remain with us?

The prophet seeks to convince the Judeans that they are still the people of God. In Isaiah 40, he invites the people to reflect back on how they were brought together. He paints a picture of a creative and strong deity.

God sits above the dome that forms heaven.
God is transcendent.
The heavens form God’s tent and his creation is God’s abode.

God is sovereign over political and military authorities. Even though they seem powerful now, God has the real power. Those who wield so much power are (to God) like plants that a strong wind could blow over. God has no earthly or heavenly equal. God stands alone. The defeated Judeans can lift their eyes to the sky to behold the heavenly bodies. They can bear witness to the divine power and his creativity. In 40:27 this powerful God cares about the Judeans. God sees them. God will provide the people with the energy they need for their journey back to Jerusalem. They can draw on the strength of God for their renewal.

Isaiah 40:31 is an inspirational word for all people –
*Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength
they shall mount up with wings like eagles
they shall run and not be weary
they shall walk and not faint*

When life has worn us down and we feel as though we cannot go on –
the prophet tells us about a powerful and creative God who remains engaged with us.

The scattered exiles can go back to Jerusalem from Babylon.
They will step into a new adventure.
In 43:19 God does a *new* thing. They will move into God's new future.
It is not seen as *going back* as much as *moving forward* into an uncertain world.
We live in a divided society that does not communicate or cooperate well.
Threats occur both internationally and within our nation.
The lesson calls us back to the faith that formed the church.
It affirms that God sees and God knows all things and that God will care for us.

We can never promise people that the problems of the world will go away.
But God holds us above the chaos and gives us the tools to engage the world and the church.

Psalm 147:1-11 and 20c (Praise the Lord!)

Psalm 147 is the second of five *Alleluia* hymns found at the end of the Psalter.
Each of the last five psalms (146-150) starts and end with the imperative – *Praise the Lord!*
These psalms put a final exclamation point on the book that the Jewish people call (tehillim).
The psalm has three stanzas –
Verses 1-6 and 7-11 and 12-20
Each opens with a *call to praise* and then continues by recounting *reasons for praise*.
The *call to praise* calls for a response.
We are to lift our voices and join in the joyous song out in the world.

Normally we sing in worship because of our relationship with God (something we do for God).
Here we are to come to worship, learn the praise of God, and then sing these songs *out there*.
And the content of our songs is to testify about God.

We are to bear witness to all who hear ... that God is God.

God is our creator and sustainer.
He determines the number of the stars and gives to all of them their names.
He covers the heavens with clouds and prepares rain for the earth.
He makes grass to grow on the hills.
He gives to the animals their food and to the young ravens when they cry.

The psalm bears witness to God's acts of blessing and redemption.
God restored Jerusalem following the Babylonian exile.
God enabled the people to rebuild Jerusalem, healed the brokenhearted, and gave them peace.
Healing and reconciliation and blessing have flowed through Israel to reach all of us.
Praise the Lord!

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

What are we willing to do so that others can see God?

The behavior of Paul seems to change based on whomever he is around at the time.
Paul is not advocating inauthenticity or pleasing others for one's own sake.
The context is the argument surrounding the consumption of idol food (raised last week).
Eating around the temple area meant ...
that one was consuming idol food and in rituals that honored the gods.

The congregation was divided over whether to eat idol food.
Some claimed that it was perfectly acceptable to dine at the local temple with *idol* food.
For them the idol meant nothing because they affirmed that there is only one God and one Lord.
This meant they could go through the motions of the ritual without honoring the idols as gods.

Others witness their behavior and think it is acceptable to honor the other gods alongside Christ.
For them the idols still exist and the rituals have power.
They question whether such participation is acceptable to God.

Those who used to believe in the other gods return to their former religious practices.
Participation in the local practices affect one's witness to the God of Israel.
Paul encourages those who have power and privilege to be willing to renounce their privileges.
Their behavior would lead others astray.

Bottom line: We are to consider our brothers and sisters in Christ (AA).
We are to be willing to renounce our rights, status, and privileges when necessary.
Because it may not be beneficial to the good of the community.

Paul talks about his own practice.
He has authority as an apostle to receive financial support from the church.
He willingly renounces that right to bring the gospel free of charge.
He would rather do some kind of demeaning work than to take their money.
What goes unsaid –

To accept the money of those with social status would make it impossible for him to correct their behavior. He cannot be indebted to them. He is only in debt to the gospel. He owes his life and existence to God.

Paul is asking those with power and status to come alongside those who they deem *weak*.
We are to consider the situation through their perspective.

Mark 1:29-39

This lesson has three parts –

A healing story (details matter)

A description of a vast number of people brought to Jesus who are healed and exorcised

An account of Jesus going to the wilderness to pray

The scenes alternate between being private and public.

The sequence illustrates Jesus' escalating fame and the tension which that creates.

At the center is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law.

It matters that the setting is the house of Simon and Andrew.

It matters that the person who is ill is a member of the family.

Family bonds (particularly the bond of parent and child) remain sacred throughout the story.

Jesus is informed about her by James and John (second set of brothers introduced in Mark 1).

Jesus *takes her by the hand* – a practical action to help her up and indicates a touch.

Jesus will also take the hand of the daughter of Jairus in Mark 5 and the boy in Mark 9.

The Greek word for *lifted her up* is also the word *raised*.

Mark does not record any of Jesus' appearances after his resurrection.

The disciples will be sent back to Galilee where they will recall his ministry and resurrection.

The verb *to raise up* is used in healing stories in Mark 1, 2, 3, 5, and 9.

So the healing of Peter's mother-in-law is the first resurrection story in the gospel.

Just as the demons do in the previous scene, the fever *leaves her*.

After being *raised*, she *serves* them.

This does not mean she gets up and prepares and serves food.

In the Gospel of Mark her service is a response of faith.

It is both to serve at a table and to do ministry. It characterizes Jesus' own ministry.

In Mark there is no account of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.

The author invites us to look for resurrection experiences in our everyday life.

To be released from illness and be restored means one can fulfill responsibilities to others.

Repair of the bonds of family is one dimension of resurrection.

In Mark there is no *individual* healing (only those that repair relationships).

Even the unaccompanied woman in the crowd (when healed) is called *daughter*.

The resurrection life!

The verses that follow suggest the enormity of the suffering and the toll it takes on Jesus.

The author is honest about the opposition to and the cost of proclaiming the good news.