



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter 7, Year B
May 13, 2018

[RCL]: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

They prayed, “Lord, you know everyone's heart.”

An interesting and easily misleading aspect of this reading is found in Peter's declaration that the Scriptures had to be fulfilled. At first glance, Peter's analysis might seem like a strict application of a theology rooted in predestination. Throughout the ages, however, the Church has taught that Scripture reveals truths about how things will unfold, but that the actions of individuals are not directly caused by these revelations. It may even be said that, in light of Christ's death and resurrection, Peter and the other apostles were able to discern a way forward through a more enlightened understanding of the prophecy of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We, my friends, are not off the hook! After all, the whole body of the baptized is called to discernment throughout the Christian life of discipleship. Sometimes in our 21st century world, discernment can be framed as something esoteric, lofty, and excessively impractical. Today's reading from Acts, however, shows us an example that is extremely practical in nature; there was work to be done, and someone needed to be appointed to do it. While casting lots may not be the most popular method of discernment nowadays, it certainly demonstrates that the 11 had a great deal of trust in God's plan and care, even in the most uncertain of times. May it be so for us, too.

- How is God nudging us out of our comfort zones so that we may use our gifts in the service of the Gospel?

Psalm 1

Verse 3: They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; everything they do shall prosper.

Only a moment ago, we were talking about the wicked and the seat of the scornful. Somehow, we have quickly moved—with a quick moment to ponder God's law along the way—to this beautiful and poetic imagery of abundance that is rooted entirely in nature. It is fitting that this wonderful, short psalm is the very first one. It may be that the Psalmist wanted to give a foretaste of what was to come by briefly demonstrating the range of topics to be addressed in subsequent segments, which constituted the bulk of daily prayers for the Hebrew people. Psalms, like the human condition, are layered, challenging, and best understood when sung!

- Do we really believe that God can handle the roller coaster of our lives?

1 John 5:9-13

At first glance, this brief reading can seem rather formulaic, almost like a mere logical pronouncement: if this, then that. Where is the heart in it? Faith is more than belief, right? If we focus on verses 11 and 12, we may begin to move beyond belief and into experience, and ultimately back into belief *through* experience. Christ, after all, has never left us:

All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a garment (Galatians 3:27) and dwell in Him, and He in us.

Christ's presence in the Eucharist is real, mystically uniting us in a divine supper that provides saving medicine to the soul.

- How can we better prepare to receive Christ in the Eucharist each week so that we more fully imitate Christ in all our daily actions?

John 17:6-19

Today's Gospel lesson comes from the 17th chapter of John's Gospel, which is a series of prayers that our Lord offers. Traditionally, these prayers are divided into four categories:

1. Christ prays for himself
2. Christ prays for the Disciples
3. Christ prays for the Church
4. Christ prays for all.

Today's portion forms the entirety of the second category, Christ prays for the Disciples. It goes without saying that God's love has no limits, and that Christ loves every corner of creation. At the same time, however, we know that the Incarnation happened for very specific reasons, and with very specific means. As such, this prayer contains a clear divide, as Jesus juxtaposes himself and the disciples with the world. Does this, then, contradict the core message of John 3:16? Absolutely not! After all, in just a few short verses, Jesus expands the reach of his prayer. Here, the "world" refers to the portion of humanity that chooses darkness over light, directly opposing the will of God. This, therefore, allows Jesus to identify himself as one who does not belong to the world, in spite of his own humanity.

We, too, know that our true citizenship is not attached to our passports or identification numbers, but to our baptism. Nevertheless, we live and move about the world with great gusto; few of us are called to a life of ascetic solitude, after all. Our greatest honor—and perhaps our greatest challenge—is to bear the light of Christ when we are so often surrounded by darkness. We cannot do it alone, just as the disciples could not do it alone; Jesus prayed for them and entrusted them with the very risky and transformative ministry that has endured for nearly two thousand years.

- As citizens of the Kingdom, how are we called to respond to darkness?

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