



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Good Friday
April 19, 2019

[RCL] Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Jesus was broken and bruised, lifted up and crucified, a king come to serve humanity. This is as startling an event as one can imagine and was foretold by the prophet Isaiah in today's Old Testament reading. Have the nations been startled? I think so, again and again. The power of the crucifixion speaks directly into the hearts of those who themselves are marred beyond human semblance, those people who have always borne the cost required to keep the rest of us in life-denying comfort. It is always startling to witness the ways in which Christians have witnessed to their faith over the centuries, willing to die for those weaker than themselves as they model their lives on Christ's example.

Isaiah prophesied the coming of Christ in every detail. He would have "nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." He would be someone that we could easily choose to despise so that we might have the choice to freely love and follow him. A man of paradox, who crossed the boundaries that separate us from God's eternal timelessness to live in a specific time and place, fulfilling God's promise to his people. To be with us, and within us, all of us. Despite the invitation to live into his fullness, we continue to seek out disunity, pitting ourselves against each other for the fleeting, transitory pleasure of being right about the things that Jesus has already turned upside-down and inside-out.

- What infirmities are you carrying around? What will it take for you to surrender them to Jesus?
- What inequalities in your community have people kept quiet about, allowing others to go like lambs to the slaughter? How can you help?

Psalm 22

Psalm 22 is written as a lamentation. It follows the formula of beginning in loud, wailing complaint to God and then returning to equilibrium. As the psalm progresses, the very innermost part of the psalmist, which had become like melted wax and was out of joint, was returned to a closer union with God. Think about the level of trust the psalmist knew to be able to complain so directly to God. The resultant self-emptying ends in a renewed dedication to living in God, a soul that shall live for him.

In Matthew and Mark's telling of the Passion, Jesus cries out to God with this Psalm. The language describes the outward signs of the crucifixion as well as the inward. The Hebrew Bible is filled with animal images used to depict demonic forces. Judas has done the work of Satan by betraying Jesus, but not without Jesus allowing

it to happen. Like the psalmist who deals with his own demons, Jesus defeats Satan and all the forces of evil that circle around him like packs of dogs as he hangs, seemingly powerless, on the cross.

- In what kinds of prayer do you engage? Do you need a prayer life tune-up? No one can go it alone. Consider starting a prayer group at your church if you don't already have one.

Hebrews 10:16-25

Within the Hebrews passage is a paraphrase of Jeremiah 31:33-34, foretelling God's promise of a new covenant to write his law in the hearts of the Israelites. Jesus is that new covenant; set in the context of the heaviness of Good Friday, it is easy to relate to the first readers of the Letter to Hebrews. The author was writing to a group of Christians whose early sense of conviction was failing them. Rather than browbeating them, he encourages them to keep their eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith (Heb 12:2). The excitement of conversion was behind them, and now the true race of Christian maturity was upon them. He reminds them that they already have the confidence to enter fully into the Christian life because it has been provided for us by Jesus, through his sacrifice. All they need to do is remember that the promised confidence is theirs.

The covenant is written in our hearts through the regeneration of baptism: "Hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." The covenantal promise isn't just for us as individuals; it is not enough for us to only focus on our own personal piety. In addition, we must "provoke one another to love and good deeds." Provocation goes beyond gently nudging each other into a lukewarm Christianity. It insists on a fully incarnational experience of the Gospel message.

- When you hear the words "provoke" or "provocation," what comes to mind? Is it an uncomfortable word? How can you provoke your own community to walk more closely with Jesus?

John 18:1-19:42

Why is Jesus always on the move? One of the effects of Jesus' travel and the naming of places is to root the Gospel in the ground of the Holy Land. It serves as a reminder of God's promise to his people, a promise which through Jesus Christ was extended to all of humanity, anywhere on the planet. Jesus is no Greek philosopher strolling calmly with his students through pillared marble buildings. He is on the ground, getting dirt between his toes and rocks stuck in his sandals from the beginning of his earthly life to the end.

Judas is easily able to betray Jesus to the soldiers because Jesus has been to this place before. Jesus goes somewhere predictable to purposefully move the story forward. He lures the enemy into a garden in which he often prayed, a place sanctified by his *being*. Here he is, the Second Adam, luring and tempting the enemy so that he can set right what transpired in the first garden. Once Jesus is bound, he is delivered to the high priest and then to Pilate. As the bait on the hook, he is threaded through the places of earthly power, corruption, and control, until finally, he carries his own cross to Golgotha to fulfill all that was prophesied and put an end to Satan's power.

- Jesus moves in all of us. Even when we aren't tuned in, he is trying to get our attention. Assess where you are in your walk and make peace with it. Are you a new Christian experiencing the rush of conversion? Or a more mature Christian worried about where Jesus is for you now?