



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Last Sunday after Epiphany (A) February 23, 2020

RCL: Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2 or Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

Exodus 24:12-18

Moses is called by God to ascend Mount Sinai again, after Moses receives the Ten Commandments and the elders of Israel worship and hold a feast on the mountain. God beckons Moses to come and receive the law on tablets of stone, signifying the permanence of that law. The text has Moses continually ascending the mountain—sometimes with Joshua, and eventually alone. Moses is about to encounter God on the Mountain—his own “mountaintop experience”.

One of the curious elements in the reading is the amount of time that Moses is forced to wait on God. First, he is told to come “and wait there.” A few verses later, we learn that Moses waits six days before God calls out to him on the seventh day. And then, Moses is with God for forty days and forty nights. The numbers may be symbolic of God starting a new thing, creating a nation of Israel just as he had promised Abraham, just like the six days of Creation. The forty days may correspond to ancestral generations, and Moses being on the mountain for that long could be symbolic of the new life, the new generation that God is inaugurating in Israel.

- Have you ever been ready to start a new endeavor, only to be told to wait? What did you learn from the waiting?
- As we approach the season of Lent, do you feel God is telling you to wait? What could that waiting suggest?

Psalm 2

This is one of the royal Davidic psalms. More than likely, it was used during coronations and the anointing of the king. The King of Israel is seen to be a king that can rival any other in the world. God’s favor towards the king and the nation is seen as the Lord declares, “You are my Son.” While the tone of the psalm is festive and joyous, there is a word of caution, a warning to the king beginning in verse 10. The warning is this: submit to the Lord with fear.

Anyone who is in any place of authority – a parent, an employer, a teacher, a political leader, and even the clergy – would do well to mark this warning and consider it often. How do we submit to the Lord? Another word for fear would be reverence, and the implication of setting God’s priorities over ours is vital. The king in this psalm may be a monarch, but his real authority comes from God—not earthly powers.

- God has declared to the king in this psalm, “You are my Son.” As Christians, we are said to be adopted as children of God. How can we live more into being a son or daughter of God in our roles at our work and jobs?

- What is one area of your life that you need to submit to God? Concerns over finances or your career? The way you use your idle time? What would that submission look like?

2 Peter 1:16-21

One of the central ideas in this epistle is the act and art of remembering. Memory of events is important for all of us. Many events define the persons we are. Sometimes, one event changes the course and trajectory of our lives. Many times, my friends and family sit and recall events together or we reminisce about people or pets who have gone. But, every time we go back and remember something, we live in those moments again.

This passage is recalling an eyewitness account of the events in today's Gospel. We have an extremely brief account of Peter seeing the Majesty of God, perhaps a story he had told the readers of this letter time and time again. The story may have been familiar. As this letter continues, one of the fine points to draw is that the readers are asked to believe what they know, not to trust in false prophets, but to recall what they have learned, especially when it comes to prophetic messages. Peter is telling the readers and hearers of this letter that he knows what he has seen, and they know him to be telling the truth, and so to remember this truth.

- Can you recall a time that God seemed “more real” than at any other moment in time? What was that moment like? What did you learn about God from that experience?
- We all have memories, both good and bad. Sometimes we go back and revisit those memories. What are things we can learn about God's faithfulness by recalling good and bad memories?

Matthew 17:1-9

If any of the Gospel passages sound like a science-fiction movie, it must be the Transfiguration. We are given images that are sometimes hard to digest. Jesus' face shines like the sun—what does that mean? His clothes dazzled white – does that mean light also emitted from them? Sometimes, when we try to describe God, and certainly an encounter with the Divine, words fail to do us justice. We are caught up in language that is inadequate or even contradictory. If Jesus' face was shining like the sun, was it also extremely hot, or was it just intensely bright? We have encountered a mystery.

We can get caught up in the questions and even begin to act like a bewildered Peter, thinking of a construction project to capture and hold the Glory of God and the heroes of old. But we often forget the important thing: being with the Divine and listening! The scene reminds us of the Old Testament lesson. So, why go to a mountain? I live in a flat area of Texas, but when I go up a mountain, the air seems clearer, the noise of the world quieter, the view awe-inspiring. It is a reality, but a different one than I experience every day. God calls us to go to the mountains not to look for him, but to see reality as it truly is.

- What would a mountaintop experience with God look like to you?
- God commands the disciples to listen to Jesus. As we approach Lent, what are some ways we can be better listeners to Christ?

This Bible study was written by John L. Blackburn, a student of the Iona Collaborative.