



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Pentecost 8, Proper 10 – Year B**  
**July 15, 2018**

**[RCL]: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29**

### **2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19**

The books attributed to the prophet Samuel tell the history of the Israelites and explain God's law for Israel under the guidance of the prophets. In chapter 6 of 2 Samuel, King David, after uniting the tribes of Israel under his leadership, takes possession of the Ark of the Covenant, containing a jar of manna, the rod of the prophet Aaron, and stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments from the prophet Moses.

In our reading, we witness a scene of celebration for this new era of unity for the Israelites with Jerusalem as their capital, and King David himself is seen giving thanks to God in praise and worship. The worship described is joyous and heartfelt, with music and dancing. While worship was the first priority for King David, he did not forget his people, blessing them and offering them food. There is one figure, however, that stands out as resenting this joyous scene: the daughter of the former king, Saul.

Every act of worship to God should be joyous and heartfelt, regardless of our preferred style of churchmanship. Our Christian unity, expressed through our common prayer and worship, is worthy of celebration, and the central place of God in this unity is worthy of genuine thanksgiving. Sometimes there are those among us who place greater value upon the form of our worship than on the substance; sometimes a newcomer simply does not understand what all the fuss is about. Either might express resentment when the worship is not exactly how they would like it to be, or when the joyous scene of worship is something to which they cannot relate. It is therefore up to us to ensure that we focus on the substance of our worship rather than the form and to reach out to those who are struggling to relate to our worship in order to be truly pleasing to God. In this way, our common prayer and worship can fulfill their purpose of uniting us as a Christian community and reaching out in love to others who have yet to fully comprehend the joy of worship.

- How do you feel during worship in your church?
- How can we ensure that God is always at the center of our worship?
- What should we do if we or somebody else is feeling resentment about an aspect of our worship?
- How would you explain our worship to a newcomer?

### **Psalm 24**

Psalm 24, *The Earth is the Lord's*, is attributed to Jesus' ancestor King David, and is recited in Jewish tradition during the return of the Torah scroll to the ark during worship. It has also been used by the

musician Handel in his legendary *Messiah*, and in the Episcopal Church's *1916 Hymnal* for the moving occasion of the consecration of a church. Such is the depth and timelessness of Psalm 24 throughout the ages.

King David reflects that it is natural that all things belong to God, for it is he that created all things. He then wonders who is worthy to stand before such a glorious God and receive his blessings, deciding that it must be those who are pure-hearted and have done no wrong in God's sight. These are the people who are searching for God, desiring to know him, and acknowledging his glory.

It is a great act of humility to accept that we are not the center of the universe. Rather, God is, and it is ultimately to him that we belong and are accountable. While nobody can claim to be perfect or without fault, we can be sure that we are heading in the right direction if we have already begun seeking to know God and his will for our lives. This in itself is pleasing to him. By humbling ourselves and acknowledging our need for God, we are opening ourselves up to him and allowing him to enter into our lives to be our strength and guide.

- In your daily life, do you behave as though you are the center of the universe or as though God is?
- How have you begun seeking to know God and his will for your life?
- How do you acknowledge God's glory in the world and in your life?

### **Ephesians 1:3-14**

St. Paul's letter to the Christian community in Ephesus, a Greek city in modern-day Turkey, incorporates themes of church unity, purity, and holiness.

In this section of his letter, St. Paul tells us of the blessings received from God the Father through Jesus Christ—blessings which we were destined to receive from the beginning of time. He explains that out of love for God, we should strive to be holy and blameless. Although unworthy, we are forgiven our sins through faith in Jesus, setting us free to do better.

We know God's will for our lives through the example of Jesus' own life. As the creator of all things, God desires all things to be united with him through Jesus Christ, a legacy which we who have faith in him have also inherited. We should live with a desire for God to be praised by all. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, we are assured that the Holy Spirit will always enable and empower us in this task.

As Episcopalians, this message from St. Paul should remind us of the Anglican Communion's First Mark of Mission: "To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom," which is regarded as Jesus' own summary of his mission on earth and the key statement about everything we do in mission. This requires all of us to be committed to personal evangelism. Nobody is exempt. In fact, the legal name of the Episcopal Church is the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society! Of course, we can be creative in our evangelism, but we are all called to share our faith in Jesus Christ with others in some way. St. Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit is always with us as we engage in this task and we should also be reminded that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). So it should be with these gifts that we fulfill our task of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom.

- How do you feel when you hear praise being given to God, especially from those new in faith?
- How is your local church community fulfilling the First Mark of Mission?

- How are you personally fulfilling the First Mark of Mission?

## **Mark 6:14-29**

This gospel is attributed to St. Mark the Evangelist, regarded as the founder of the Christian community in Alexandria. It was written for Greek-speaking Christian converts with a need to explain unfamiliar Jewish traditions and Aramaic terms.

In this section of St. Mark's gospel we are told how the life of St. John the Baptist, a man most well-known to us for baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan, came to an end. At this point in the Scriptures, there is still confusion over who Jesus really was, and many, including King Herod, had become convinced that Jesus was the resurrected St. John. The death of John was clearly troubling King Herod's conscience. However, the king had felt obligated to order his execution because he had promised his step-daughter that he would grant her any wish. When, under the influence of her insecure mother, the step-daughter wished for the head of St. John, the king felt that he could not refuse.

Does this situation seem familiar to us? Have you ever done something that you really did not want to do, knowing it to be wrong and troubling your conscience? Perhaps we have been in positions of power over others, just like King Herod, and have used that power to command somebody else to do something in an attempt to avoid direct responsibility. Like Herod, are we more afraid of the consequences from those around us than from Jesus, who will hold us accountable for all our actions at the end of time? While Jesus offers forgiveness, we must be truly remorseful for the wrongs that we have done and sincerely attempt to change the attitudes that led to those wrongs. Let us, therefore, have the courage to always attempt to do what is right in the eyes of God.

- Have you ever done something wrong out of the fear of disappointing someone?
- Are you more worried about the approval of others than the approval of God?
- If you could relive any of these situations again, what would you do differently?

*This Bible study was written by Daniel Woods of St. Andrew's Theological Seminary in Quezon City, the Philippines.*

Published by the Office of Communication of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

© 2018 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.