



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 20 - Proper 25 (C)
October 27, 2019

RCL: Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

Joel 2:23-32

This passage from the book of the prophet Joel begins by calling the children of Zion to rejoice as the writer tells of God's plentiful provision. The rain has come in abundance, the threshing floors overflow with grain, and the people of Zion will feast and give thanks to the Lord their God. The days of famine and destruction give way to the days of plenty and praise. The people of Israel will know that their God is among them, and they "shall never again be put to shame" (Joel 2:27, NRSV).

The writer then offers a vision of the outpouring of God's spirit on all flesh. This outpouring will be accompanied by prophecies, visions, and cosmic signs— the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. In the New Testament, this moment of outpouring of God's spirit is believed to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost as told in Acts 2. Peter stands and addresses a crowd in Jerusalem and quotes this portion of the prophet Joel to explain the events of that day (Acts 2:14-21). The promise of this portion of Joel's prophecy is that God's spirit will indeed be poured out richly on God's people and that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

- How have you experienced the rich outpouring of God's spirit recently?

Psalm 65

This psalm of praise is rich in agricultural imagery and vividly describes God's provision for the earth and all creatures. God visits the earth to give water in abundance and in turn provides grain and food for God's people. The psalmist speaks both of God's sovereignty and of God's gracious care. For the psalmist, the obvious response of the people of this earth to such goodness is awe and praise— "those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs" (Psalm 65:8, BCP).

The psalm begins, however, by acknowledging the need for all transgressors to come to God. One of God's greatest provisions for us, the psalmist indicates, is forgiveness— "our sins are stronger than we are, but you will blot them out" (Psalm 65:3). Those who experience this forgiveness can join the psalmist in saying, "awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation, O Hope of all the ends of the earth and of the seas that are far away" (Psalm 65:5).

- How are you reminded of God’s gentle and gracious care and provision for yourself, the earth, and all creatures?

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

The second letter to Timothy is written by a devoted follower of Jesus at the end of his life to his younger companion in the faith, Timothy. This passage comes at the end of the letter as the writer acknowledges that his time is almost up. He has “fought the good fight” and “kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7, NRSV). He did so even in moments when remaining faithful wasn’t easy. The writer tells that in a moment of need, no one came to help him, but instead his friends deserted him. Yet, at no point did God abandon him. The writer states that God strengthened him so that the message of the gospel could be spread. As he closes this letter, the writer seeks to remind Timothy—and us as well—that God is faithful and will never abandon us, no matter the circumstances.

- How have you experienced God’s presence and faithfulness in the midst of hardship or difficulty?

Luke 18:9-14

In this portion of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus offers a parable to those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt” (Luke 18:9). To teach this lesson, Jesus describes two individuals who in his time would have been seen as examples of virtuous and corrupt living—a Pharisee was a member of the religious authorities and a spiritual leader while a tax collector was one who gained money through dishonest dealings and was generally despised by many. Jesus tells that these two went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee’s prayer is really just a speech meant to bring attention to himself. The Pharisee extols his own piety and his commitment to spiritual disciplines. He is self-congratulatory and confidently pleased that he is “not like other people” (Luke 18:11).

The tax collector, on the other hand, offers a prayer of humble and genuine contrition. He is aware of his sins and shortcomings, he acknowledges that he is a sinner, and he pleads for God’s mercy. This person, Jesus teaches, is the one who leaves that place justified. Once again, Jesus offers a parable that completely reverses expectations. The tax collector, the one seen as corrupt and morally bankrupt, is offered as an example to follow while the religious official is characterized as self-absorbed and haughty.

This parable is an invitation to remember that humility is central to the Christian life. Jesus offers the example of the tax collector to show us the importance of remembering that we are sinners always in need of God’s mercy. God does not seek empty piety; God seeks genuine and authentic relationship with us. We can only do that when we come to God, like the tax collector, in a state of humility and honesty.

- In what ways might God be inviting you, like the tax collector, to be fully genuine in your life of prayer?

Patrick is a third-year seminarian at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale and a deacon preparing for ordination to the priesthood in the Diocese of Virginia. Prior to starting seminary, Patrick spent two years with the Episcopal Service Corps in Richmond, Va. He is especially passionate about liturgical studies, tennis, and all things related to Italy.

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

© 2019 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.