



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Wednesday in Holy Week
April 17, 2019

[RCL] Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

Isaiah 50:4-9a

This passage from Isaiah is often referred to as the third servant song of Isaiah. The servant songs are believed to prophesy the redemptive role of Christ in the world. The other three servant songs are found in Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, and 52:13-53:12. The message of this passage is one of comfort for the Lord's people. The servant is teacher and sustainer of the weary. He plays the role of mediator to and with the world. Both in listening to God and man is he constant. The lectionary stops at the first half of verse 9, which is too bad because the second half of the verse, "All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up," describes the impermanence of the enemies of the godly. This is in contrast to God's servant, who is unwearied by those who strike him, spit on him, and insult him.

This passage encourages us because it shows that we are loved by a God who never gives in to our adversaries. Sometimes in life, we are too quick to admit defeat during trying times. We can't see the whole course which we must run, but God does and will continue to instruct and help us along the way. There is more attention paid to the ear of the teacher than the tongue. The ear of the teacher is awakened anew each morning for the task of listening to the student. God listens to us afresh each time we bring our problems to him.

- In what areas of your own life can you improve your ratio of listening to speaking?
- The servant has set his face like flint but also has given his back to those who have struck him. This seems like it would require us to stay receptive when under fire in our lives. Is there a situation in your life that you need to bring to God so that your heart does not lose its softness?

Psalm 70

Psalm 70 is a lamentation, begging God to deliver the psalmist from what torments him. The use of the term "Aha!" stands out strangely; it seems like there must have been a more dignified way to describe how a tormentor torments. But in reality, why lend dignity to those who tear us down? All of us can relate to being exposed when we are down, and the type of people who prey on the weak are despicable.

This psalm does not ask God to punish the evildoer, but to aid the suffering, and for the evildoer to realize his own shame. The priority is on deliverance of the needy. That is where God's action is most needed. In our own lives, letting go of our anger at those who have hurt us helps us to grow closer to God. Evening Prayer begins with, "O God, make speed to save us. O Lord, make haste to help us." This aligns us for prayer and allows us to let frustrations of the day fall behind us.

- Where in your own life do you need to correctly order your response to those who hurt you?

- We all carry around a laundry list of hurts. Can you use this psalm in your own prayer and devotion to help you forgive others who may not even know that they hurt you?

Hebrews 12:1-3

To understand the fullness of the cloud of witnesses, read Hebrews 11, in which the author goes through a recitation of the biblical record of all who have gone before. He repeats over and over again that they had faith which saw them through their trials. The coming of Christ will sweep all the faithful up into the cloud of witnesses, whom we should imagine are cheering us on. The unknown author was writing to bolster a group of Christians who were not maturing in their faith the way he expected them to. Chapter 11 emphasizes that the pattern of history was irresistibly moving to the coming of Christ. He exhorts the early Christians to allow themselves to be carried along in the momentum and not look back.

Beginning in chapter 12, we are encouraged to set aside the sins that cling to us and weigh us down. We should literally look up to Christ as the template for our lives so that we might run our races and not falter. Yes, there are times we suffer, but Christ turns all of that upside-down. It isn't too much to see Jesus in a tracksuit, running alongside us, encouraging us. For the original readers of Hebrews, this passage may have brought to mind Greek sporting events, but also Roman persecution. They would have lived in fear of persecution and needed encouragement to not fall back into their old patterns of belief.

- How did you do in running your Lenten race? Did you manage to keep your commitment to giving something up or taking something on?
- If your Lenten commitment was hard for you, don't give up yet! Imagine Jesus coaching you to become more self-aware in your daily decisions. What people from your own past can you use as examples of how to run the race of Christian discipleship?

John 13:21-32

Chapter 13 introduces the disciple known only as "the beloved." The idea that Jesus had a disciple that he favored or was closer to seems a little jarring in light of what we know of God—that he loves all his children. In the context of the farewell meal, it heightens the tension we feel, drawing us closer to the heart of Jesus and the sadness and anger he felt over what comes next.

When Peter motions to the beloved disciple to ask who will betray Jesus, we are taking part in an intimate moment as Jesus reveals Judas's role. This is John's telling of the farewell meal and the only mention of bread is that which is handed to Judas. Judas is obedient to Jesus and leaves as soon as Jesus commands him to, but Satan has already infected the heart of Judas. This is underscored by the words at the end of verse 30: "And it was night." Once the betrayal has been set in motion, Jesus can begin to speak directly to the disciples about what must happen; the intimacy between Peter, the beloved, and Jesus has served the difficult purpose of setting the betrayal in motion.

- Why is this the only mention of bread in this scene? Jesus talks about bread regularly in John; compare this to the "I am the bread of life" passages.
- When John writes, "And it was night," in verse 30, is there an echo of Genesis 1? During the Creation account, each day ends with the phrase, "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day."