



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 5 (B) February 7, 2021

RCL: Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-12, 21c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

Isaiah 40:21-31

I have spent many days and nights in the wilderness of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Northern Minnesota and the Rocky Mountains of Wyoming and Colorado. The modes of travel are either paddling or walking, often leading to weariness and faint feelings. However, when you truly live for some days in the wilderness, you cannot help but be overcome by the majesty, the beauty, and the wonder of nature and of God. Isaiah, in this poem, describes God in that same way, in majesty and wonder, a presence that has always been. Isaiah ends this passage with the great hope of resting into a God who will not tire and who will renew our strength, even when we are weary of paddling and walking any of the wildernesses we travel through.

- How do you see God's majestic presence in your life?
- Do you allow yourself to hope in God, a presence that is always there, to renew your strength? If so, how do you do this?

Psalm 147:1-12, 21c

This is a psalm of praise. It is part of the ending Hallelujah psalms that conclude the Psalter. This text begins and ends with the same Hebrew "hallelu-Yah" or "praise the Lord" – a nice wrapping for the reader and a reminder to praise God. Within the body of this text, we see God's power, as in verse 5: "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; there is no limit to his wisdom." We also see human weakness and how God's power helps us, as in verse 3 – "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" – and verse 6 – "The Lord lifts up the lowly." The "lowly" practice a humility that calls us to let go of our pride and power. This letting go is part of emptying ourselves of the power that often consumes us – our ego and desire to get ahead – and allowing the power of God to come into us. When we do that, we put our hope in God and God's unfailing love. Love is the power!

- What are your ways of praising God?
- How do you let go of your power and give into God's power of love?

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Paul's letter to the Corinthians was written at a time when the city of Corinth was thriving. It was a city with major trade routes, both by land and sea. It was a city of Greek culture, emphasizing Greek philosophy and wisdom. It was a city of Greek religion, with many temples, notably the temple to Aphrodite, whose worshipers practiced religious prostitution. With all the action, wealth, ideas, and sexual immorality, one's identity could be lost in a city like Corinth – not unlike many places we live today. Paul's text for today reminds us of the Christian identity. Who are we as Christians? What is our Christian identity? The Christian identity is centered on the gospel, the life and teachings of Jesus. This gospel center is not just about hearing the text, but about living it and preaching it.

- How do you live and preach the gospel? Remember that preaching does not have to mean giving a sermon at the pulpit.
- What is at the core of your Christian identity? How are you living that Christian identity?

Mark 1:29-39

In this text from Mark, we see three important points about Mark's Jesus and one of his important practices. First, we see Jesus' authority at the beginning. Jesus is healing the sick and driving out demons. People want to be present to that authority; in verse 33, we see that "the whole town was gathered around the door." Another point worth noting is that Jesus makes sure that who he is remains a secret. In verse 34, Jesus "would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." The final point, from verse 38, is that Jesus' purpose for his ministry is preaching: "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

The important practice that we see Jesus undertake is in verse 35. He went off to a solitary place where he prayed. This is a practice that we need to form. Going to a solitary place forms both our outsides and insides. It is important to find a place to be with God – a space in your home, a walk, or a chair that envelops you. We also must find an internal solitary place, so that we can slow our minds, breathing prayer in and out.

- What is your current prayer practice?
- What are some examples of solitary places, both on the outside and the inside, where you can go for prayer?

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