



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Trinity Sunday (B)**  
**May 30, 2021**

**RCL: Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29 or Canticle 13 (or Canticle 2); Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17**

### **Isaiah 6:1-8**

This passage gives us the call story of the prophet Isaiah. It recounts how this particular person came to speak on behalf of God; prophets often go through a trial that marks them as God's mouthpiece. In Isaiah's case, that happens quite literally—the prophet's lips are marked by a burning coal. On a broader level, this passage describes one intense kind of spiritual experience. Seemingly out of nowhere, Isaiah finds himself in the presence of the Living God, and it is beyond awe-inspiring: it is terrifying. Like many before him, Isaiah's instinct is that no one can see the Lord and live. Yet he not only lives but is dramatically empowered by this experience. He is emboldened to respond to God directly: "Here am I; send me!"

- The past year has marked us all in ways we're aware of and perhaps in ways we don't yet understand. In the midst of all its frightening trials and terrible griefs, are there also ways that you find yourself empowered or emboldened?
- Is there something in your life that makes you feel unworthy to stand before God? Note that Isaiah felt unworthy, and God called him anyway. If your sense of your own worthiness were no longer in question, what do you think God might be calling *you* to do in the next season of your life?

### **Psalm 29**

This psalm invokes the presence and power of God in a massive storm. God's voice is heard in the roaring wind, the lashing rain, the thunderclaps that shake the earth. In this cosmic scene, God rides the storm from above the sky, and the heavenly court gives praise and glory to God's might. As in the passage from Isaiah, we feel overwhelmed by the scale of God's grandeur; we feel how small we are in the vast reaches of creation. Again, this storm-riding God inspires awe and terror; yet it would have been obvious to those in the dry hill country of Israel that such storms were also life-giving: a drenching rain could be the difference between a failed crop and a successful harvest, between a hungry child and a healthy family.

- Can you think of a time when your jaw dropped in awe of nature's grandeur? Does it stretch your concept of God to imagine God as being viscerally present in such a scene?

- What is the life-giving rain that you're praying for this week? Where do you need nourishment or refreshment?

### **Romans 8:12-17**

One way to think about this passage is that Paul is trying to expand the imagination of the Jesus-followers in Rome. The church in Rome is a radical community made up of both Jews and Gentiles, which means Paul is addressing people with lots of different received ideas about what a god or God is like. Paul is playing off of a theme that ran through many different religions in the ancient world: a god demands worship, obedience and tribute, and one always runs the risk of angering that god and incurring their wrath. Such gods were imagined to be notoriously demanding, fickle, and unforgiving.

Paul is trying to get the whole Roman church to grasp that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is radically different than that, and how that matters for their lives. God is not a slave-master who keeps believers in line through fear, Paul insists. God is a loving Father who wants nothing more than for God's children to flourish ("Abba" is even more intimate than that, meaning "Dad," or even "Daddy"). To be called by the Spirit and become a follower of Jesus means that we also relate to God like Jesus did—as this fiercely loving, infinitely forgiving *dad*. Jesus shows us what it looks like to live as a child of this gracious father: not seeking status or gain above the other children but struggling humbly for the liberation and healing of all our siblings.

- Is there an arena of your life where you're trying to score points with God, or to compete against others for approval? What would it mean to let go of that impulse to measure up, trusting you're already the object of God's delight?
- Paul was writing to the Roman church to address its internal divisions: God's children were fighting with one another. Is there someone you're in a fight with right now? Does it change your perspective on that to think of them and yourself as children of a loving father who delights in you both?

### **John 3:1-17**

Nicodemus knows that there's just something about Jesus. But he also knows that the miracles and signs that Jesus is doing represent a critique of the Temple system—and Nicodemus has a position of power and privilege in that system. He senses that Jesus is the real deal, but he also senses that if that's true, he'll have to reevaluate almost every part of his life. Still, there's something undeniable about Jesus, something that promises a larger life than the one he has now. So, Nicodemus comes to Jesus curious and cautious, under the cover of darkness.

And poor Nicodemus: right away, he's in over his head. Jesus tells him that he must be born "from above"—that he must let go of the identity and a status that has been working pretty well for him so far, and embrace a new identity, as a child of the God who loves the world so much that he sent his Son to redeem it. But there's a gentle joke here in the text at Nicodemus' expense: the Greek word meaning "from above" also means "again," and Nicodemus gets confused.

- Is there a part of your own faith journey that you look back on and gently, generously chuckle at yourself? It's hard for all of us to get our heads wrapped around God's infinite love, and we all get sidetracked or scrambled. Can you picture God—our infinitely forgiving father—smiling at you as you try to puzzle it out?
- What's something that's drawing you forward on your faith journey right now? What about God's promises revealed in Jesus feels like "the real deal?" Is there a part of your life or identity that you might have to let go of to take that step? Does that feel scary, or freeing, or both?

*Carl Adair is a postulant for the priesthood in the Diocese of Long Island and a student at Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Meg, a radio producer and reporter. Before seminary, Carl worked in the restaurant industry and as a teacher's aide with students with disabilities; he also earned a Ph.D. in English Literature and taught college English in two New Jersey state prisons. He is the seminarian intern at Zion Episcopal Church in Douglaston, Queens, N.Y.*