



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 5 (C)
February 6, 2022

RCL: Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Editor's Note: You will note that today's author uses a convention common in some traditions for avoiding fully writing out the name, or in this case, a common substitute for the name, of the Lord. Generally, this spelling is used by writers who do not wish to risk the name being destroyed or defaced. It can be read as you normally might.

Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah had warned the leaders of Judah of G-d's pending judgment. The people of Judah's adulterous passions broke their relationship with YHWH. Their foundation of being who had once been a G-d of faithfulness and provision had been replaced by gods of want and aversion. The result: The poor are neglected, the land is ravished, and they are just like every other nation. In an epic vision of technicolor phantasm, G-d reveals G-dself to Isaiah. Like smoke billowing from a fire, G-d's sovereignty and holiness envelop the whole earth. Overcome by G-d's holiness, Isaiah declares his unworthiness to be in the presence of the "Lord of Hosts." What happens next? This sovereign, holy, completely other G-d invites and sets apart a finite creature to proclaim the good news of salvation. In partnership with Isaiah, G-d promises to bring refining fires, and Zion would once again be a light to all nations.

- How does it make you feel that a transcendent G-d has an indissoluble connection to G-d's creation?
- In what ways might G-d be calling you to live a life set apart to serve amid your community?

Psalm 138

In this song of thanksgiving, the worshiper recounts a time of dangerous turmoil and how G-d's faithfulness delivered them from the "fury of [his] enemies." Overcome by the reality of who G-d is, the worshiper maps out who G-d is and how G-d works in the world. This psalm invites us to see the juxtaposition of G-d's transcendent otherness and G-d's immanent indwelling with us. Yes, G-d is above all the gods. Yes, G-d's name is above all names, and G-d's words are above all words. All the kings of the earth praise our G-d. G-d is transcendent. And yet – interwoven in the exclamations of G-d's awesome otherness, the worshiper reflects on the intimate relationship with G-d: "When I called, you [that is, G-d] answered," and "Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly."

Psalm 138 beautifully celebrates the unfathomable love that G-d has for G-d's people, even those who find themselves on the margins. At the end of it all, what sets G-d apart from other gods, what makes G-d worthy of praise, is that G-d is a G-d who is *for* the worshiper. G-d is a G-d who is *for* us.

- Which stanza of this psalm would reflect your testimony?
- In what ways has G-d's enduring love been present in your spiritual journey, and how do you respond to G-d in kind?

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

In the first fourteen chapters of the letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes a polemic against divisiveness, sexual misconduct, food sacrificed to idols, and chaotic worship. Paul identifies the root of the issue as a disregard for one's neighbor. For Paul, it is not enough to only say, "Jesus is Lord," – rather, all aspects of one's life should reflect this reality.

In chapter fifteen, Paul tackles the question of the Resurrection. In his response to the Corinthians' skepticism, Paul leaves no room for misunderstanding. Christ died and Christ rose again – a fact supported by first, numerous eyewitnesses, including himself, and secondly, the reorientation of reality birthed through the regeneration of the Resurrection. The latter point supports the question of the "how" for the previous chapters. How can all of one's life reflect the Gospel? The answer is through the Resurrection. Christ dismantles death and sin in the resurrection and pours out regenerative grace that reorients us to a life of kingdom values. Paul testifies to this grace in his own life by reflecting on his past as the leading persecutor of the church, and how he is now a humble apostle and faithful proclaimer of the Gospel.

- How does your testimony reflect G-d's resurrection power in your life or your community's life?
- In what ways do the sacraments sustain you in living out the hope of a world being regenerated by resurrection power?

Luke 5:1-11

One could argue that the focal point of this story is the miracle of a great catch of fish or even the calling of Simon Peter. However, there is another perspective here that is worth our attention—the crowd's. Sometimes it is easy to forget in the thrill of this narrative that the crowd is even there. Throughout the Gospel narratives, "the crowd" or "the people" always press toward Jesus, trying to get closer, reaching out for something. In Luke 5, the crowd wants to hear the "word of G-d." Not a word of inspiration, a pithy statement, or anecdote – no, they want to hear the *word of G-d*. They want to hear the words that created the cosmos that animated dust into life; they want to hear a word that sustains and transforms.

Jesus, sensing their longing, fulfills their need not just for today but forever. After teaching the crowd, Jesus calls Simon Peter to "[catch] people." In this scene, we see a perfect foreshadowing of what is to come. Peter will be the rock the Church is built upon. While neither of them knew it, parish and priest met each other for the first time. In the calling of Peter and the continual calling of G-d's people, the word of G-d would continue to be heard by those longing to be sustained and renewed.

- How has the ministry of the word impacted your faith journey?
- Do you see yourself within this narrative? Where?

*This Bible study was written by **Brittany Sparrow Savage**. Growing up, I was raised in the Church of the Nazarene. This denomination, being very mission-minded, introduced me to the love of G-d and the ways in which the Spirit moves. Sensing a call to ministry, I decided to attend Trevecca Nazarene University and majored in religion with a minor in pastoral ministries. After graduation, I married the fabulous Cameron, and we moved to Kansas City so that I could attend seminary at Nazarene Theological Seminary. During my time in seminary, I discovered the Anglican tradition. I fell in love with the ancient liturgies, their love for social justice, and above all the formation through prayer. I graduated from seminary in May of 2021, and I am finishing my Anglican Year at the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry. Many thanks are given to St. Augustine's Episcopal Church for their mentorship and love. This blessed community has helped me find my church home and a place to rightly discern G-d's call on my life.*