



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 18
Proper 23 (C)
October 9, 2022

[RCL] Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

Mention of King Nebuchadnezzar indicates that Jeremiah's prophecy comes after the Israelites have to leave Jerusalem. Through Jeremiah, God offers instructions to God's people, who are exiled from their promised home. While in exile, God will continue to help them prosper; their relationship is not severed by their relocation; God's grace follows.

Metaphorically, this passage shows God speaking to people who experience any form of exile. For example, many people are estranged from their families of origin, and others are refugees who have to live far from their homelands. More broadly, Christian interpretations of Genesis tend to agree that humans all experience an "exile" from the original union with God that was intended.

God instructs us to set down roots despite this exile: build a house, marry someone from the new place, pray that the land will flourish. The prophecy tells us to embrace the place where we find ourselves. Anywhere in creation, we can choose to be joyful and care for one another.

- What steps can you take to flourish in the place where God has set you?
- How can we support people living in literal exile, like the ancient Israelites were?

Psalm 66:1-11

In the words we call the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13), Jesus affirms that we should ask for what we need in prayer. But the psalms and Jesus both teach us another language of prayer, too: praise. Psalm 66 begins with an instruction to all people: Be joyful in God; sing the glory of God's Name! Praise – music, group worship, prayer – lifts us to a higher plane, out of our daily human existence and closer to alignment with God. The psalm exhorts us to sing the glory of God – not for God's sake, but ours.

- For what gifts can you praise God today?

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Tradition tells us this letter was written by Paul, though scholars widely agree that it was someone writing under Paul's name. The letter is addressed to Timothy, a leader of a young Christian community facing serious divisions. The author writes to instill confidence in Timothy to lead his church. As long as he follows the right

path, he will find support in God. We may feel restrained in this world, “but the word of God is not chained” (2 Tim. 2:9, NRSV). The world may seem to be one of scarcity, but in God, there is only abundance.

Talking about Jesus, the letter promises, “If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us” (v. 12). Will Jesus give up on us if we reject him? Perhaps instead of offering a threat, the letter reveals how closely we are united with Christ; denying him is equivalent to denying ourselves. Our true natures abide in God. The next line continues, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful” (v. 13a). Both are true at the same time: rejecting Jesus is as dire as denying our true selves, and yet, Jesus remains faithful, regardless of our wavering.

- In what ways are you “chained” in life, and how does God’s word offer abundance?
- In what way does our self-understanding change when we see ourselves first as belonging to God?

Luke 17:11-19

Jesus heals ten men with leprosy, and only one of them returns to thank him. The text makes sure to mention that this grateful, returning man is not a Galilean but a Samaritan – a foreigner. Today, we think of Samaritans as good, thanks to the Parable of the Good Samaritan earlier in Luke (10:25–37). But in Jesus’ time, Samaritans were the natural foe of any story because they were considered as Gentiles. This Samaritan’s behavior is a reversal, where the outsider expected to behave poorly becomes the model disciple.

A close reading of the narrative reveals two types of healing. First, all ten are “made clean” from their leprosy. But Jesus uses a different word for the one who returns. He says that the man’s faith has “saved” him, according to Young’s Literal Translation. When they ask him for mercy, Jesus alleviates the suffering of all ten of the men. But he only calls the one man “saved” – the one who turned back (repented) and praised God for the miracle.

- Who plays the role of the natural foe in your stories, and what would it mean for them to become the model to follow?
- What is the difference between the one thankful man who was “saved” and the other nine whom Jesus made clean?
- When good things happen, how can we remember to return to God and offer thanks?

*This Bible study was written by **Helena Martin** for Proper 23 (C) in 2019.*