

EPIPHANY 5

Year B

This Bible study was written by Paula Jefferson for Epiphany 5 in 2018.

Isaiah 40:21-31

²¹ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of
the earth?

²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
and spreads them like a tent to live in,

²³ who brings princes to naught
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

²⁵ To whom, then, will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob,
and assert, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ He gives power to the faint
and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted,

³¹ but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their
strength;

they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

Commentary from Paula Jefferson

In Isaiah 39, the prophet gave Yahweh's judgment to King Hezekiah: Judah would soon be overtaken by Babylon. After this ominous message, the second major section of Isaiah, known as the Book of Comfort, begins. This section of Isaiah includes chapters 40 through 66. Our reading occurs in the opening paragraphs of the Book of Comfort. Here, the image of God's majesty is presented through poetry. For those who had heard Isaiah's prophecy, this poetry would have offered a contrasting view of Yahweh: the consoling deliverer.

Discussion Questions

In this passage, Isaiah responds to the harsh judgment of Yahweh (Isa. 39) with contrasting imagery. Where do you see the contrast between sin and redemption at work in the world today?

Psalm 147:1-12, 20c

¹ Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our
God!*

how pleasant it is to honor him with
praise!

² The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; *

he gathers the exiles of Israel.

³ He heals the brokenhearted *

and binds up their wounds.

⁴ He counts the number of the stars *

and calls them all by their names.

⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power; *

there is no limit to his wisdom.

⁶ The Lord lifts up the lowly, *

but casts the wicked to the ground.

⁷ Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; *

make music to our God upon the harp.

⁸ He covers the heavens with clouds *

and prepares rain for the earth;

⁹ He makes grass to grow upon the mountains *

and green plants to serve mankind.

¹⁰ He provides food for flocks and herds *

and for the young ravens when they cry.

¹¹ He is not impressed by the might of a horse; *

he has no pleasure in the strength of a
man;

¹² But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear

him, *

in those who await his gracious favor.

²¹ Hallelujah!

Commentary from Paula Jefferson

Psalms 146 – 150 form a collection known as The Endless Hallelujah. Psalm 147:1 invites the community of Israel to praise Yahweh. Verses 2 – 6 describe Yahweh's good works. Verses 7 – 11 repeat the cycle: in verse 7, the invitation to praise, and in verses 8 – 11, the reasons to praise Yahweh. For thousands of years, this Psalm has reminded us to praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

Discussion Questions

In our busy lives, pausing to praise Yahweh may be difficult. How might our lives be affected by creating space and time for daily worship?

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

¹⁶ If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a wage, but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸ What then is my wage? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to gain Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not outside God's law but am within Christ's law) so that I might gain those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become a partner in it.

Commentary from Paula Jefferson

Paul proclaimed the gospel with no expectation of payment or other earthly reward. Corinth was a society in which success was known by wealth, power, and prestige. Paul sets himself apart from secular recognition: the gospel is God's message of grace and Paul will do whatever is necessary to bring the message to all of God's people. God's abundant grace is available to the weak, the slave, the citizen, the Jew, and all others in Corinth. This must have been a peculiar message in a city that prized status.

Discussion Questions

Many of us live in societies like Corinth. As Christians, our daily walk in the world is an opportunity to proclaim the gospel. What is the gospel message we are communicating?

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸ He answered, "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." ³⁹ And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Commentary from Paula Jefferson

This passage continues to reveal the healing power of Jesus. For those in Galilee, rumors were traveling quickly about the healer. People were coming to see him. Jesus retreats from the village of Capernaum to pray alone. He is found by his disciples, who encourage him to return. But Jesus announces that it is time for him to travel throughout Galilee to proclaim the message, "Because that is why I came." Throughout this gospel, making the good news accessible to the Gentiles is a consistent rhetorical message. In verse 38, Mark makes clear that proclaiming God's message was Jesus' reason for being in their midst.

Discussion Questions

Living conditions in Galilee were primitive. Suddenly, Jesus moves among them—and he is able to heal the un-healable. Surrounded by people needing his divine touch, Jesus retreats to pray alone. When the world presses upon us, the example of Jesus suggests that we should intentionally hit the "pause" button and spend time praying. What benefits do you see in choosing to follow Jesus' example? What challenges do you see?