

PENTECOST 17

Proper 19 - Year B

*Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies.
Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.*

Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴The Lord God has given me
a trained tongue,

that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens,
wakens my ear

to listen as those who are taught.

⁵The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;

I did not turn backward.

⁶I gave my back to those who struck me
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;

I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

⁷The Lord God helps me;

therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand in court together.

Who are my adversaries?

Let them confront me.

⁹It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

In this reading, one of his “servant songs,” Isaiah adopts the voice of God’s suffering servant, the Messiah. He is to be a teacher, dedicated to relieving his people with a new lesson. He will be obedient, even through suffering and injustice. And he is resolute, leading and saving his people from perdition.

Early in the school year, Isaiah reminds us what it is to teach. Teaching is a noble profession, of course, but also a noble undertaking that those of us outside the classroom can do. Just as our Lord is obedient to his Father, we can be, too. Just as he sustains the weary, wherever he finds them, we can, too. Just as he commits himself to teaching God’s truth to a world rarely receptive to it – we can, too.

Discussion Questions

Who taught you about Jesus?

Where in this song do you hear foreshadowing of Jesus’ ministry on earth?

Psalm 116:1-8

- ¹ I love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication, *
because he has inclined his ear to me
whenever I called upon him.
- ² The cords of death entangled me;
the grip of the grave took hold of me; *
I came to grief and sorrow.
- ³ Then I called upon the Name of the Lord: *
"O Lord, I pray you, save my life."
- ⁴ Gracious is the Lord and righteous; *
our God is full of compassion.
- ⁵ The Lord watches over the innocent; *
I was brought very low, and he helped me.
- ⁶ Turn again to your rest, O my soul, *
for the Lord has treated you well.
- ⁷ For you have rescued my life from death, *
my eyes from tears, and my feet from
stumbling.
- ⁸ I will walk in the presence of the Lord *
in the land of the living.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

This psalm is so reassuring. Just like the psalmist, we have this compassionate guardian who watches over us, even as the grave reaches out to ensnare us. While we must accept that we will be brought low in life – probably as often as anyone! – God has given us himself and each other to help us back on our feet. Thanks be to God that we can rest secure in this knowledge!

Discussion Questions

It can be hard to hear these praises and still see death and destruction around the world – and even closer to home. What do you think God would have you or your congregation do to confront death in all its forms?

James 3:1-12

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will face stricter judgment. **2** For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is mature, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. **3** If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. **4** Or look at ships: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. **5** So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a such a small fire! **6** And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of life, and is itself set on fire by hell. **7** For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, **8** but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, made in the likeness of God. **10** From the same mouth comes a blessing and a curse. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. **11** Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? **12** Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

James' imagery in this piece is stunning and comes alive to us. His lesson rests on our tongues – signifying our ability to communicate with others based on our thoughts and feelings. And those thoughts and feelings, as we all know, can take a number of forms. They can be kind and generous; they can be cold and rational; they can be brave and noble; they can be cruel and biting. We are blessed with the power to use our language to build great empires, to tame the wilderness, and to raise up the downtrodden – but we are cursed with the power, used too often, to break spirits, to mock and denigrate, and to destroy the very world.

Discussion Questions

Does James come off as too harsh in this reading?

Where have you seen carefulness with words build something great?

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Our readings once again show the power of language and teaching. Peter – who bumbles along like the rest of the disciples – gets things right; there is one answer above all for who Jesus Christ is: The Messiah. This Jesus, whose words are eternal life, whose teachings point us to the good life, whose way is narrow but open to *all*, this Jesus whose love encompasses those we despise – he is the Messiah. One of the greatest things we can undertake in this life is to confess this truth: he is not merely a good guy, a great teacher, a prophet, a desert philosopher, a victim of political and religious oppression – he is those things, of course – he is Lord of all.

Discussion Questions

Do you remember when you were first convinced that Jesus Christ is Lord?