



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 23, Proper 25 – Year B
October 28, 2018

[RCL]: Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Psalm 34:1-8, (19-22); Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

The Book of Job is a classic story, told with many classic elements: a squeaky-clean protagonist who still falls on hard times, three antagonists, and here, finally a resolution beyond the reader's wildest dreams. The restoration of Job's riches comes not only in an unbelievable amount, but through an unbelievable series of events. Job, the hero, does not conquer God to restore his former wealth. Job does not pull off a last-second feat of strength against all odds. No, the story here stands out because Job receives God's bounty after humbling himself even more before God. Job had been humbled to the point of collapse, and still Job never lashes out to curse the all-powerful God. Instead, Job relies on God's power of redemption and exercises humble faith beyond the reader's wildest dreams.

This departure from the classic hero story is not a typical showcase of the human spirit, but of God's power to restore. This is the story of God, told through the life of Job. Our faith in God alone can yield riches beyond imagination. Faith in God, not in ourselves, is the ultimate source of restoration. Job's final act before his restoration proves that our faith and humility are powerful: "And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends," the very same friends that tried to convince Job that his sinfulness caused his downfall. Job found faith that God would even restore them, too, and then Job became the most blessed man in all the land.

- In the face of extremely hard times, what do you focus on to keep your faith in God's power strong?
- What silver linings have you found during an extremely hard time in your life?

Psalm 34:1-8, (19-22)

The American theologian Jonathan Edwards famously illustrated that experiencing God is not like having the sweetness of honey described to you, but rather like experiencing the taste of honey yourself. Psalm 34 must have been the catalyst that set off that illustration in Edwards' mind. This psalm is packed with action verbs, from what we are to do: bless, glory, proclaim, exalt, seek; to what God does: answer, deliver, save, encompass. Then, in verse 8, "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

Tasting can be a risky action, and there really is no substitute. We can look and sniff all we want, but our taste buds will be the only real measure of sweetness, saltiness, and other informants as to whether a food is acceptable or not. And because what goes into our mouths must be life-giving and not dangerous, the

stakes are high. In this psalm, we are encouraged to take the risky leap of faith, to let God in as life-giving sustenance. The Lord is good, bursting with energy and delight, like sweet honey!

- Would you say that you are an evangelical person? What makes it difficult, or risky, to proclaim God's goodness in our everyday language; then, what makes it easy?
- When you fully experience God's presence today, like tasting honey, what are the real rewards that you experience?

Hebrews 7:23-28

This must have been a great task of the first hundred years of Christianity: convince the faithful Jews, of which Jesus of Nazareth was one, that the Messiah had actually already come and gone. So many faithful adherents to the Hebrew Law lived during Jesus' years, unaware that the Messiah walked the earth somewhere far away, or even nearby (or even right in front of them.) Jesus' earliest apostles had a lot of convincing to do.

In this passage, the case is made that Jesus serves as a new priest, and furthermore, eternally. The power of Jesus' death and resurrection to change so much of their faithful practice must have been so difficult to hear, much less to adopt. And for hundreds of years, that remains the Christian task: spread the word that there was a man, born of God, fully divine while fully human, who will forever be your priest, as well as much, much more. The prophecy of Isaiah 53 has been fulfilled, as real as you and I now speak. Jesus came to be the Messiah, anointed as the greatest High Priest, and still is.

- What do you go to your priest for? What is the primary role that he or she serves?
- In what ways does Jesus serve as your priest as well?

Mark 10:46-52

In this short glance at Jesus' healing ministry, a blind beggar begins by sitting on the side of the road, then ends up on his feet, following Jesus. Is this the transformation that Jesus offers us too? Maybe so, but the middle part is critical. We have to call upon Jesus' holy name more than we call upon everyone else that passes by where we sit, because Jesus is the one with the healing power. The blind beggar knew this, and said, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He would only do this if he had faith that Jesus could provide what he needed the most. And his own faith turned out to be the cure.

- What healing miracle would you call out to Jesus for, if he walked by where you sat today?
- What first inspired you to follow Jesus? What has continued to inspire you to follow Jesus?

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