

PENTECOST 2

Proper 7 - Year C

This Bible study was written by Robin Denney for Proper 7 (C) in 2016.

1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a

¹⁹ Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³ Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

⁵ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you."

⁸ He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. ⁹ At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

¹¹ He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound

of sheer silence. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram."

Commentary from Robin Denney

Fearing for his life and in the depths of despair, Elijah journeys, not by his own strength, to the mountain of God. Awesome forces of nature go before God, but Elijah knows the Lord well enough to know that these terrifying sounds fall short of declaring God's glory. Instead, the sound of sheer silence is the most fitting for the presence of God. Elijah makes his case to the Lord, twice, how because of his faithfulness to God, his life is now in danger. And what is God's response? Is it: "You're right Elijah, I've asked too much of you, you should give up and hide." No. God says, "Go, return." Sending is in the very nature of God. Elijah is not sent by his own strength or his own zeal, but by the power of God, to face his fears, to realize his own limited nature and God's unlimited grace, and to participate in God's mission.

Discussion Questions

When have you experienced the presence of God in silence?

Have you ever felt called, or sent by God?

Psalm 42 and 43

- ¹ As the deer longs for the water-brooks, *
so longs my soul for you, O God.
- ² My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living
God;*
when shall I come to appear before the
presence of God?
- ³ My tears have been my food day and night, *
while all day long they say to me, "Where now
is your God?"
- ⁴ I pour out my soul when I think on these things: *
how I went with the multitude and led them
into the house of God,
- ⁵ With the voice of praise and thanksgiving, *
among those who keep holy-day.
- ⁶ Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?
- ⁷ Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the
help of my countenance, and my God.
- ⁸ My soul is heavy within me; *
therefore I will remember you from the land
of Jordan, and from the peak of Mizar among
the heights of Hermon.
- ⁹ One deep calls to another in the noise of your
cataracts; *
all your rapids and floods have gone over me.
- ¹⁰ The Lord grants his loving-kindness in the
daytime;*
in the night season his song is with me, a
prayer to the God of my life.
- ¹¹ I will say to the God of my strength, "Why have
you forgotten me? *
and why do I go so heavily while the enemy
oppresses me?"
- ¹² While my bones are being broken, *
my enemies mock me to my face;
- ¹³ All day long they mock me *
and say to me, "Where now is your God?"
- ¹⁴ Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?
- ¹⁵ Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the
help of my countenance, and my God.
- ¹ Give judgment for me, O God, and defend my
cause against an ungodly people; *
deliver me from the deceitful and the wicked.
- ² For you are the God of my strength; why have you
put me from you? *
and why do I go so heavily while the enemy
oppresses me?

- ³ Send out your light and your truth, that they may
lead me, *
and bring me to your holy hill and to your
dwelling;
- ⁴ That I may go to the altar of God, to the God of my
joy and gladness; *
and on the harp I will give thanks to you, O
God my God.
- ⁵ Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?
- ⁶ Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the
help of my countenance, and my God.

Commentary from Robin Denney

The psalmist is consumed with longing and heaviness. Yet even from the depths of despair, the psalmist remembers who God is, God's love and faithfulness, God's marvelous deeds. Then something amazing happens, like nearly every other psalm of lament. Somehow in the remembering of who God is, despite the current terrible situation the psalmist is in, the heart of the psalmist is turned toward God. Trust in the Lord and gratitude is the fruit of this practice of remembering God. The pain does not go away, nor does the trouble, the anguish, the enemies, and yet everything is different. The change comes from within the heart, and in relationship with God.

Discussion Questions

How important is the psalmist's first step of longing for God?

What are ways that you can remember who God is, when you are in a difficult time?

Is trusting in the Lord something a person can decide to do? Where does trust in God come from?

Galatians 3:23-29

²³Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be reckoned as righteous by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Commentary from Robin Denney

Humans seem to be particularly adept at making categories, divisions, and delineations. Layers of social conditioning and choices we make, including bias, stereotyping, and racism compound the biological brain functioning that allows us to classify, for example, edible and inedible things. We experience the world, and even relationships, through these filters. Paul explains that Christ turns all of this upside down. The law encouraged holiness through separation, division, and apartness. But Christ encourages a different kind of holiness, holiness through Christ, in whom divisions do not exist. Christ who encourages us to break down these divisions, to see each other as siblings, to accept our mutual inheritance of the promise of God.

Discussion Questions

In what ways is your church community living into this division-less identity in Christ? Where is there room to grow?

What practices have helped you to overcome bias, stereotyping, or racism?

Luke 8:26-39

²⁶Then they arrived at the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, shouting, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me,” ²⁹for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. ³¹They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³²Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding, and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they became frightened. ³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Commentary from Robin Denney

We hear very little from the man who is possessed by demons. The demons define him, who separate him completely from community, and who are the ones who speak to Jesus. After he is healed, it is the swine herders and townspeople who speak. Finally, as Jesus is leaving, we see the man begging to go with Jesus. Yet Jesus has a different vision for him. The man instead is sent out into his community in witness to the wonderful works of God in Christ. This man, an ultimate outsider, voiceless victim, unclean among the unclean, is chosen by Christ to bear his message. It is through no virtue or strength of the man, but through his brokenness that he is called.

Discussion Questions

In what ways has God set you free or worked through your brokenness?

Do you ever talk with non-Christians about faith, religion, Christ? Recall a conversation that was meaningful and share.