



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Advent 4, Year B
December 24, 2017

[RCL] 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

While David has in mind what most people would conceive of in hearing the word “temple,” God appears to be thinking of something altogether different. This is especially clear whenever we read this passage through the lens of the New Testament. David desires to construct a building for the Lord. Yet, we see that God is resistant to the notion, not because he dislikes the idea in general, but because David is not the one he has chosen for this task, and there is more to the notion of temple than a physical building. New Testament authors and the Church Fathers and Mothers would later read this passage typologically, depicting human bodies as God’s temple. Mary certainly had a hand in this construction in bearing Jesus, the person in whom God’s fullness dwells. Jesus also constructs the temple of God out of the Church. The point in all of this is not that God doesn’t want a temple in which to dwell, but rather that David’s blueprints do not quite align with God’s. We will come to find out that God prefers human bodies over inanimate buildings.

- How should we treat ourselves knowing that our bodies are temples for God, and how should this notion impact how we relate to others?

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

Whenever we hear the word “faithfulness,” we may be too quick to attribute it to a merely human attribute. We think a lot about fidelity within our relationships and within marriage. We reflect upon our own faithfulness to God and the Church. While there is nothing wrong with the consideration of such things, we tend to forget to think about God’s faithfulness *to us*. It is God’s faithfulness to us that serves as the precondition for our faithfulness to him. Before ever choosing God, God has chosen to be *for us*. Our expressions of faith to God are not the initiation of a relationship—they are the response to a God who has dedicated himself to us all along. He opted to be *for us* even before we came into existence. You and I are enfolded into the promise that God made to his people in ancient times. God’s dominion certainly has extended and, as if with one voice, we say to God, “You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.”

- Compare how much you think about your faithfulness and how much you think about God’s. Which do you think you should spend more time thinking about?

Romans 16:25-27

In this doxology, Paul would have us lift our hearts to the God who can strengthen us “according” to three different things, and these three *accordings* form an interesting progression of thought. To paraphrase, God strengthens us according to the proclamation of the Gospel, according to the revealed mystery of Christ (which now incorporates the Gentiles), and according to the sanctifying command of God. The movement is from the mere reception of the Gospel, to the reinterpreting of the Old Testament Scriptures in light of the mystery revealed (and beholding the cosmic Christ in light of this revelation), then to the life of obedience that forms the response to these things. If we are to immerse ourselves in the wisdom of the “only wise God,” we must keep these dynamics together. God’s wisdom will not permit us to simply receive the Gospel and do nothing with it, nor will it let us be negligent towards the inclusion of all sorts of people in the Church as we seek to live lives of obedience. The wisdom of God keeps all of these dynamics intimately together. We should do likewise.

- Which of these dynamics has strengthened you in your faith journey? To which might you need to be more attentive?

Luke 1:26-38

In Luke’s Gospel, the story of Jesus doesn’t begin where one might presume it should begin. It doesn’t begin with Jesus. Rather, the story of Jesus begins with his mother. While we may be tempted to read our own finely-tuned theological presumptions back into this story, we would be wise to read the text for what it is saying and not for what we have come to expect it to say. In other words, the Incarnation is not the central theme in this passage, nor is Luke trying to convince us that Mary is the *Theotokos* (“God-bearer”), although aspects of these ideas certainly can be inferred. Rather, Luke would have us turn our attention to the fact that God has used the meekest of human beings to accomplish his divine will. He would have us meditate upon Mary’s response to God (her willingness in saying, “Let it be...”), and perhaps it is this preexisting demeanor that has earned her the title “favored one,” even before the child is conceived in her womb.

- How important is Mary’s “let it be,” and how does it enhance how we think about the Incarnation?
- How significant is it that God does not bypass human participation in bringing about his divine will?

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