



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 3, Proper 5 – Year B
June 10, 2018

[RCL]: 1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15); Psalm 138; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15)

One of the great problems of human life in community is what the sociologist Max Weber called the “routinization of charisma.” Is it possible to take what we have achieved under the leadership of a single, extraordinary individual and create rules and systems that will allow that success to continue, or does the creation of rules destroy the creative and flexible charisma that allowed this success in the first place?

This is exactly the problem the Israelites face in our reading today. After centuries of instability and war, they have finally found a strong and wise leader in the prophet Samuel. Yet they sense that Samuel’s time is coming to an end, and so they ask him to appoint a king to rule them, as the other nations have. Samuel warns that God alone should be their king and lists the many ways in which human kings tend to abuse their power. Nevertheless, the people are determined to be like the other nations. In their desire for security and power, they decide to conform to the model of leadership set out by the world around them.

- Have you ever been involved in a ministry or project after its founder or leader has left? How did that transition work? What would you do differently?
- People often try to apply their understandings of business or government to the way the Church operates. In what ways do you think this is helpful? In what ways is it unhelpful?

Psalm 138

This psalm is the first in a series of hymns of praise with which the Book of Psalms conclude. The psalmist gives thanks to God for God’s response to his prayers (v. 4), and for God’s accompaniment “in the midst of trouble” (v. 8). The psalm reiterates typical Biblical themes of God’s care for the lowly (v. 7) and of God’s love and faithfulness (v. 2).

- Some English translations render “When I called, you answered me” (v. 4) in a more literal translation of the Hebrew text as “On the day I called, you answered me.” Yet sometimes our prayers feel as though they aren’t answered for a long time, if ever. What could it mean to say that God answers our prayers on the day that we call to God?

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Evangelism is one of the hot topics in the Episcopal Church today. In this passage, Paul opens with a concise summary of the importance of the resurrection to his proclamation of the faith. “We also believe,” he writes, “and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus” (v. 13-14). It is because we know that God raised Jesus from the dead, and because we know that in the resurrection of Jesus we find our own resurrection, that we trust in God. Evangelism at its core means sharing the good news—in Greek, the *euangélion*—of this resurrection and the hope that it brings us.

One of the topics Paul is dealing with in 2 Corinthians is the criticism he has received from some members of the church in Corinth, who claim that he is poorly-spoken, unimpressive, and weak. Against their criticisms, Paul presents his reliance on Christ and not his own skill or power. This passage presents a beautiful example of the way in which Paul’s faith has strengthened him to face this kind of criticism and allowed him to “not lose heart” (v. 16), by keeping his focus on the good news.

- Is the news of Jesus’ resurrection good news for you? Why?
- How do you speak about this good news? How do you share it with others?
- Does the message of the resurrection provide you with strength and comfort in the face of difficulty? How?

Mark 3:20-35

This is the third Sunday in which we are reading through the Gospel of Mark. Last Sunday, Jesus’ disciples picked grain on the Sabbath and he cured a man’s hand on the Sabbath. In the text of the gospel that we skip over to get to this week’s reading, a large crowd gathers around Jesus because of his miraculous healings, and he appoints the twelve apostles. This week, Jesus’ teaching continues with a series of sayings.

These sayings might seem to be randomly thrown together at first, without much uniting them. But if you look carefully, you might see a pattern. The reading begins mid-sentence; if you started from Mark 3:19b, you would read, “Then [Jesus] went home [literally ‘to a house’]; and the crowd came together again...” The theme of house, home, and family run throughout this reading.

- What is Jesus’ true home, and who are his true family? What is the demonic, divided house he has come to plunder?
- When has the Church been your family, your “brother and sister and mother” (v. 35)? Is there a time when it has supported you and your family, or when it has supported you in a time of conflict in your family?

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