



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Wednesday in Holy Week
April 8, 2020

RCL: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Deutero-Isaiah (or “Second Isaiah”) is believed to be the author of chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah. The author is writing during the time of the fall of Babylon, the empire that had destroyed the Temple and sent the people of God into exile. This reading is connected to the servant, a recurring figure in Isaiah who is believed to be Israel. The previous prophets, Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah had called Israel to repentance for not being faithful to their covenant with God. Deutero-Isaiah focuses on the restoration of God’s people and encourages them to not grow weary as the God of Israel is trustworthy and faithful.

- In verse 4, the author credits God for giving him the ability to “sustain the weary with a word.” Who is weary in your world? How can you use your words to sustain those around you?

Psalm 70

A lament is defined as a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. Psalm 70 is an individual lament psalm. The author pleads for God’s deliverance. We don’t have details about what situation the author is facing, but many of us can relate to feeling poor and needy, as in verse 5.

Our American society is generally allergic to lament. We seek distraction, numbing, and avoidance rather than facing our fear, grief, and loss. This psalm gives us words to lament to God, even if we aren’t sure if our problem qualifies. We don’t need to be able to win the suffering Olympics to ask God to make haste to help us.

- What prevents us from sharing our laments with God?
- How could the Psalms help us to share our deepest sorrows and fears with our loving and present God?

Hebrews 12:1-3

The audience of Hebrews is a struggling community, no longer feeling the high of new faith. Just like the difference between falling in love and having a decades-long relationship, our lives of faith also go through stages. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is the conviction of things not seen. It is challenging to not be able to have a two-way conversation with God and get our questions answered directly, to not be able to touch the wounds in Jesus’ hands and receive proof of our faith. Chapter 11 tells us about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab holding onto faith, in spite of

not seeing the promised outcome. Moses did not enter the promised land after leading God's people out of Egypt. Rahab, a prostitute and an outsider, trusted in the God of the Israelites. Abraham was about to sacrifice his son and heir in faithfulness to God's command, despite the covenant that God would make Abraham the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

Our reading encourages us that we have these ancestors gathered around us, along with the multitudes of others who have also lived a life of faith. We are not running this marathon of faith alone; we are surrounded on all sides by those who have also run the race, cheering us on. We are part of a great lineage of faith.

The author reminds us not only that this cloud of witnesses is surrounding us but also asks us to keep our eyes on Jesus. The Son of God knows the struggles of being human, including suffering and joy and friendship and betrayal. Keeping our vision fixed on Jesus gives us the perseverance and strength to keep faithfully running. Even at our lowest moments, we are not alone. The cloud of witnesses surrounds us, and the grace of Jesus Christ sustains us.

- Who are the spiritual ancestors in your lineage that surround you in the cloud of witnesses?
- What are some weights and sin that are keeping you down and making it difficult to run the race of faith? What would it look like to lay aside those heavy burdens during this Holy Week?

John 13:21-32

This reading gives us a piece of the story of the Last Supper in the Gospel of John. In order to have a fuller understanding of this reading, we need to understand what happens around this selection. We call it the Last Supper, but the disciples do not realize that this will be the last meal they will share with Jesus before his death and resurrection. During the meal, Jesus washes his disciples' feet, a lowly task fit for servants, not the Son of God. Peter balks openly at Jesus washing his feet, perhaps verbalizing the reaction of the other disciples. Jesus, undeterred, washes their feet and then commands them to wash one another's feet. The disciples continue to struggle to understand the countercultural reign of God, that God does not come as a mighty conquering king, but instead as a servant washing the feet of others. Our reading tells the story of Jesus predicting that Judas will betray him, Judas leaving after the prediction, and the rest of the disciples still not understanding what is about to happen.

Verses 31 and 32 teach that God will be glorified through the cross. Throughout the Gospel of John, glorification is linked to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The symbol of execution, used by the empire to showcase their power and might, would become transformed by the power of God's love into a symbol of a servant, a foot-washing Messiah. God's kingdom is countercultural, and it is easy for both the disciples and us to miss the seismic difference between our values and the values of God.

- What does it mean to you that God brings glory out of a perceived shameful event: God's son dying on the cross?
- Have you experienced God bringing glory out of a shameful event in your own life?

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