



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 11
Proper 16 (C)
August 21, 2022

[RCL] Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

Jeremiah 1:4-10

HELP WANTED: Seeking prophet in Jerusalem. No previous experience necessary. Children may also apply. There is no pay. You will be required to proclaim things that your audience does not want to hear – mostly things admonishing them to change their bad behavior. It is a 24-hour per day job and things are about to get worse as your king dies and foreigners conquer your people and make them leave their homes. You will, however, have the unconditional support of your boss, who will literally put the words in your mouth. Much of what you will be required to say is about destruction, though there will be some messages of restoration and hope. To apply, please pray to God.

How many people would apply for such a role? And yet, Jeremiah was called by God at a tender moment in Israel's history when it lost its independence and was ultimately exiled to Babylon. Jeremiah, much like Moses, is resistant to God's call. He highlights that he is only a boy. How could he possibly know what to say as a prophet to the nations? How scary that must have been. God, however, tells Jeremiah that God has always been with Jeremiah since his very beginning and that God will be with him as Jeremiah says hard things to his people.

- What is an example of a hard situation where you felt called to speak up against an injustice? How did you react? Where was God in that situation?
- What does it mean to be a prophet? What were the biblical prophets doing? Who do you see as a prophet in our current times?

Psalm 71:1-6

In Psalm 71, the psalmist presents themselves as aged (v. 9), perhaps looking back and appealing to God not to forget them. It is a lament mingled with appeal, hope, and praise of God. The theme of God as refuge implies the psalmist's relationship with God is one of seeing God as providing safety but also as one of a sanctuary (v. 2) or more concretely, as a stronghold (v. 3). The psalmist also expresses their faith in God from birth until now (v. 5-6).

- When has God been your refuge? How have the psalms been a part of that experience or how could they be in the future?

- How do your prayers to God resemble this psalm or not? What in this psalm inspires your own prayers to God?

Hebrews 12:18-29

In our current society, with a church on what seems like every corner, it can be hard to imagine the early church: small, fledgling, persecuted, but also trying to define themselves. This particular passage in Hebrews juxtaposes the “new” covenant of Christ with the “old” covenant of the Jews as part of defining who they were. It begins by referring to the covenant at Mt. Sinai that Moses made with God on behalf of the Israelites (v. 18-21). The blazing fire refers to Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush. And the voice that they begged not to hear is the voice of God (Ex 20:19) because it was so powerful, the Israelites feared dying.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews then contrasts the Sinai covenant with Zion and the heavenly city of God and the new covenant of Christ (v. 22-24). In the last few verses, the author promises that God’s voice will not only shake earth but heaven as well and what will be received will be that which rests and is unshakable (see the notion of a “stronghold” in Psalm 71). The last verse again reprises the image of God as fire, though this time as a *consuming* fire.

- The author makes a point to highlight “the better word” of Jesus (v. 24) vis-à-vis the Mosaic Sinai covenant implying a hierarchy of Christianity versus Judaism. How can Christians define themselves without denigrating their Abrahamic siblings (Jews, Muslims, or other religions)?
- This scripture highlights the awesomeness and fearsomeness of God’s voice and uses the metaphor of fire for God both in discussing Sinai and Zion. How are these applicable to other members of the Trinity? What other metaphors come to mind for God? How do they shape how you conceive of God?

Luke 13:10-17

Women are present in abundance in Luke’s gospel. The famous story of Martha and Mary is in Luke’s gospel (10:38-42), as is the woman who is a sinner and anoints Jesus’ feet (7:36-50). However, what are the women doing and saying? In this story, the woman does not have a voice.

Healing is an important part of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus empowers his disciples to heal. The word “salvation” is used by Luke to describe what Jesus is doing for the people. Thus, healing is part of Jesus’ salvation. It is not his healing ministry, however, that creates friction in this story. It is that he is healing on the Sabbath, the day of rest, that causes the leader of the synagogue to protest that there are six days available for work and the seventh is the Sabbath as God commanded. Still, throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is healing on the Sabbath (4:39, 6:6-11, 13:10-17, and 14:3-6). And each time, a leader tries to call him out on it, and with wit, each time he poses the question back to them: Is it better to do harm or good on the Sabbath?

- Whose voices are present and whose voices are silent in your day-to-day life? How can you be more aware of this? What can you do to help silent voices be heard?
- Do you observe a sabbath? What does it look like? What does it mean to keep it holy? How does or could your time of sabbath in God inform the rest of your week?

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