



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

All Saints' Day (C) (tr.)
November 6, 2022

[RCL] Daniel 7:1-3,15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

Texts like this are confusing: We are dropped into an ancient conversation without a lot of context. In this case, Daniel, a prophet, is dreaming. He has an ominous vision: four great beasts come up from the deep, menacing the earth. Daniel asks the “attendant” in the story—perhaps a friendly heavenly being?—just what is going on. The message is hardly assuring; these beasts represent some kind of sinister rule over the earth, each monster representing a king.

And yet, this apocalyptic and cryptic image is hopeful: the story doesn't end with these beasts and a reign of terror. Instead, the attendant assures Daniel and us: “The holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever—for ever and ever.”

- What monsters lurk in the depths of your soul? How does it feel to acknowledge them?
- What does the kingdom that the holy ones will inherit look like?
- Who or what helps you interpret frightening dreams? How can you find hope even in the dreams and realities that scare you?

Psalm 149

The psalms collectively feel like an unwieldy romp through human emotions. However, Psalm 149 itself is a ride through joy, praise, and glory, to some of the uglier human emotions, such as a thirst for vengeance. This psalm makes a sudden shift in the sixth verse when it moves from songs of praise to calls for swords, punishment, and binding of enemy kings.

While the context may seem foreign to us, like the psalmist, we live in a confusing and chaotic world, with frightening national and international conflict. Swept up in fear and fervor, we also may call for our enemies to be bound up, or for those who hurt us to also suffer.

It can be comforting when thinking about challenging texts, like some of the psalms, to realize that the theology of the psalmist need not be our own. However, it is also comforting to know that God has been hearing about very human experiences like pain and revenge throughout time immemorial. By bringing all

our prayers to God—even the ugly ones—we allow God to move through our fears and anxieties and create a new way for us.

- What emotions are you scared to bring before God? Why?
- What do you think would happen if you brought your whole self—including feelings you may be afraid of or don't like holding—into your prayers?
- How do you think God feels when we bring ourselves honestly before God in prayer?

Ephesians 1:11-23

Churches often use today—All Saints' Day—as a time to remember those who have died in the past year. It's a time to look back on our losses and mourn those who are no longer with us. However, Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us that our inheritance with the communion of saints is greater than death.

Paul knew anxiety, and he knew the messiness of being in community. In fact, this letter to the Ephesians is often credited to Paul while he was jailed. Despite this letter traditionally being associated with Paul's imprisonment, Paul reminds us that we are subjected to and protected by powers greater than princes, principalities, and even death: the love of Christ Jesus. He writes that Christ has power over “every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.” We are unified in Christ's love through his resurrection. We may mourn those we see no more, but we also remain connected to them in his triumph over death.

- What is your inheritance as a Christ follower?
- When and how do you feel most connected to the communion of saints? Why do you think that is?
- This passage says Christ is “all in all.” What does that mean to you?

Luke 6:20-31

Do you feel a little uncomfortable? This passage from Luke—known as the Sermon on the Plain—is this Gospel's corollary to Matthew's gentler Sermon on the Mount. While the concepts may seem familiar, Luke doesn't mince words; in this passage, Jesus' blessings are coupled with curses and leave little wiggle room for American audiences who may be rich, full, laughing, and spoken well of in their lives.

As we think about the lives of the saints who came before us—including those who led extraordinary lives of self-sacrificial love—Luke's Sermon on the Plain reminds us that to be a follower of Jesus is a blessing that may come at a cost. We may lose our wealth, our comforts, and our status. We are told to pray for and love those we may not like: something easier said than done. It's a reminder that the Kin-dom of God doesn't prize earthly markers of success, but instead relies on the teachings of the Golden Rule.

And yet, this Kin-dom is subversive. While Jesus says to “turn the other cheek,” he is not requiring us to sit with injustice. Under Roman law, a person could strike another only with their right hand. A backhanded slap was how one disciplined those beneath themselves. To offer the other cheek is not to be submissive: it's to demand that someone strike you as their equal and be hit with an open palm rather than the back of the hand. In this Kin-dom, all claim equal footing as beloved creations of God.

- What is your gut response to Luke’s Sermon on the Plain?
- How does “turning the other cheek” look in today’s world?
- What costs are you willing to pay to follow Jesus?

***Kristen Ostendorf** is in her second year at General Theological Seminary, working on her Master of Divinity. She is a postulant for holy orders in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. She has worked as an educator, primarily as a high school history teacher, for about 15 years, and a newspaper reporter and copy editor before that. Born in St. Louis, Kristen came to the East Coast to follow her career in journalism after she graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with dual degrees in journalism and sociology. She earned her master’s degree in social studies education from Rutgers University in 2004 and has taught in a variety of environments. Most recently, she taught American and global history at a local Quaker school. She is based in the Philadelphia area, where she is raising her two daughters, Abigail and Tessa. Kristen has been active in a variety of ministries at her home church, and she has engaged in anti-racism work, facilitating workshops for the diocese, her church, educators and the wider community on the topic of white privilege. Kristen has engaged in ministry with the most vulnerable in Philadelphia, most recently working with people who are unsheltered and suffering from substance abuse as part of a mendicant outreach effort. When not studying, Kristen is a part-time educational consultant. She enjoys time with her girls, reading, running, walking, and hiking. Kristen looks for ways to lean into silence in the busyness of life.*