

BIBLE STUDY SERIES, Year B, 2021

Proper 1-18, RCL

Parish of the Good Shepherd, Waban

(These question sheets use brackets—[]—to mark verses that were included in the old Lectionary but are not used in the Revised Common Lectionary. You will not hear them on Sunday, but they will add to your understanding.)

Our Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle, constructed around the first three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke. (These are called the “Synoptic Gospels,” as if seen through a common eye.) Each year we read more or less straight through one of these, with variations for special seasons. (The Gospel of John, which transforms history into poetry, is used to heighten times of extraordinary celebration, such as Christmas and Easter.) The new Lectionary year begins on I Advent. This is Year B, and our Gospel is Mark.

The weekly reading from Hebrew Scripture (the “Old Testament”) during the post-Pentecost season usually offers two options. The first respects the integrity of Hebrew Scripture by moving through books sequentially; in Year B, it follows the “Monarchical narratives,” the stories of Israel’s kings. The second option, the one carried over from the previous Lectionary, uses passages chosen to echo or enhance some theme in the Gospel reading, though sometimes it’s a challenge to guess what the editors had in mind!

The “New Testament” reading usually comes from one of the Epistles, and like the Gospel readings it tends to go straight through one book at a time. There is usually no deliberate connection between its contents and the other readings, but it is startling how often they seem made for each other anyway. In special seasons, selected passages from the Book of Acts or Revelation may be used instead.

The post-Pentecost season

For your information

Technically, last Sunday--Trinity Sunday--was the first Sunday of the (post)-Pentecost season, “Pentecost I.” But it was also a highly dramatic, special sort of Sunday. So this is the week that we set out on that long, wandering journey with Jesus and his disciples, when the big dramas are still to come, and the disciples are trying to figure out what’s going on here. Jerusalem is still far away; but every week something is added to the momentum which will eventually, inexorably, take them there.

In this season, readings are tied to particular dates, so that if Easter comes late, several of the Propers are not used.

GO TO PROPER 5.

[Proper 1

II Kings 5: 1-14

Ps 30

I Corinthians 9: 24-27

Mark 1: 40-45

II Kings 5: 1-14

Elisha is the prophet chosen by God as Elijah's successor. The writer is careful to show how his deeds demonstrate that he has inherited Elijah's powers. This incident involves the pagan king of Aram and his powerful general Naaman. "Leprosy" refers to any of the disfiguring skin diseases which marked the victim as unclean.

Questions

1. Why does Elisha heal by means of a messenger, not face to face? Why does Naaman almost refuse? Why does the (unnamed) king of Aram rend his garments?
2. Who are the agents who persuade these two men to change their minds? Is this significant?
3. Why do you think this reading is assigned for the Epiphany season?

If you have time

--See Lev 14 for instructions concerning different kinds of "leprosy" and what to do about them, including the role of the priests in reincorporating one who has been cured.

I Corinthians 9: 24-27

Questions

1. Here is one of Paul's favorite metaphors for discipleship. How exactly is a disciple like an athlete? Do you find this image helpful? Why, or why not?

Mark 1: 40-45

For your information

Again, those called "lepers" in the NT might have had any of a number of disfiguring skin diseases. All scrupulously pure Jews would have avoided them, and they would have been excluded from the synagogue; hence the need for priests to declare a man cleansed.

Questions

1. What picture is given here of the relationship between Jesus and the leper? Why does the leper come to him?
2. What instructions does Jesus give the healed leper? Does he obey? What is the result? What sort of "epiphany" is this?

Proper 2

Isaiah 43: 18-25

Ps 41

II Corinthians 1: 18-22

Mark 2: 1-12

Isaiah 43: 18-25 (and read vss. 16-17)

Questions

1. It is customary for God to “present credentials” before making a pronouncement. What credentials are presented in vss. 16-17?
2. What is new about the “new thing” that God is about to do? What relationship does it seem to have with Israel's past?

II Corinthians 1: 18-22

For your information

There were troubles in Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church after he wrote I Corinthians. He sent them a severe letter, and was deeply worried about its effect, but Titus brought him word of great improvement. Much of II Corinthians is in response to this good news after a painful time.

One of the accusations made against Paul by the Corinthians had been that he had promised them a visit, but had delayed it and seemed to vacillate.

Questions

1. Why is Paul so emphatic that he and his companions would not say “Yes and No” to the Corinthians--i.e. equivocate, rather than being consistent?
2. What does it mean, that in Jesus Christ “it is always 'Yes'”? that “in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'”? Do God's promises appear that way to you?**Mark 2: 1-12**

For your information

“The word” that Jesus is speaking to the crowds includes the whole nature of God's will, promises and actions, the creative power that appears more fully in John 1.

The scribes were a prestigious class of “guardians of the law,” the first five books of our Scripture which form the basis for Jewish faith and practice, and were closely associated with the Temple in Jerusalem. At a time when Jewish beliefs and practices were gravely endangered by the Roman occupation, they would have been especially scrupulous about offenses against the law as they understood it.

Questions

1. Here we see Jesus back in Capernaum after only a few days. What has changed since his last appearance there? How is that dramatized? How does this passage sum up the first “chapter” of his ministry?
2. Why are the scribes offended by Jesus' words to the paralytic? How does he respond? What are we apparently intended to understand about him through this encounter, and through the immediately preceding episodes? What is “shown forth” here?

Proper 3

Hosea 2: 14-20

Ps 103: 1-13, 22
II Corinthians 3: 1-6
Mark 2: 13-22

Hosea 2: 14-20

For your information

At a time of Israel's serious dereliction, God has commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute, Gomer. His marriage to her, and his faithfulness in spite of her infidelities, becomes a metaphor for God's relationship with Israel.

The Valley of Achor was the place where the Israelites stoned a thief to death just before coming to the Promised Land. "Baal" is the name of the chief Canaanite god, or sometimes a generic name for pagan gods.

Questions

1. How does God win Israel back? Why does God bring her "into the wilderness"? When has this happened before, and why?
2. What is the language of God's promises to her? How is the Valley of Achor to be transformed, and why is this relevant? What sort of covenant is promised? How does it apply to us?

II Corinthians 3: 1-6

For your information

Corinth was at a crossroads of Mediterranean trade, and so was affected—or infected—by all sorts of influences and temptations from the wider world.

Here is another example of Paul's problem with language. For him as a Jew, he would not use the word "flesh" pejoratively, since body and spirit were one for him; but he must translate his theology into the different language and culture of Greek-speaking Gentiles. He uses "flesh" to mean those things of the material world that draw us from God.

Questions

1. What seems to be the evidence that the Corinthians are "people of the flesh, ...infants in Christ"? What have they been quarreling about? Why does this show them to be "merely human"?
2. What does Paul mean, that he fed them "with milk, not solid food"? How would he have done that? Do we ever do that, in church or elsewhere? With whom?
3. In drought-prone Zimbabwe, there is a church called, "St. Apollos the Irrigator." Why?

Mark 2: 13-22

For your information

Levi seems to be the man called Matthew in other accounts. As a tax collector, he was shunned by other Jews because he was an agent of the hated Roman occupiers. “Sinners” refers to others who were in violation of Jewish law. An observant Jew would not share the religious observance of table fellowship with someone “unclean”

Scribes and Pharisees bore particular responsibility for maintaining the law, as evidence of faithfulness to God.

Questions

1. How do you explain Levi’s instant response to Jesus’ call? Why do you think so many “sinners and tax collectors” gathered around him?
2. What is Jesus’ response to the scribes’ and Pharisees’ objections? How does he understand his mission? How would they hear these words?

Proper 4 : June 3

I Samuel 3: 1-10 (11-20)
or Deuteronomy 5: 12-15
Ps 81: 1-10
II Corinthians 4: 5-12
Mark 2: 23-3: 6

I Samuel 3: 1-10 (11-20)

For your information

Hannah was barren for many years, until God intervened and Samuel was born. In gratitude, she gave him to God, first (at about age 12) as a servant to the priest Eli.

Eli’s sons had been behaving scandalously, and though he had reproved them, he had not strongly intervened.

The lamp in the temple goes out at dawn. The ark of God is portable, and signifies the presence and power of God.

Questions

1. What was the condition of Israel’s relationship to God at this time?
2. How does the story convey Samuel’s youth and faithfulness? How does Eli know that the voice in the night is God?
3. Why might God choose a child for such a message? What message is Samuel given? Why is he afraid to deliver it? How does Eli receive it? How does Samuel’s life develop from this point?

Deuteronomy 5: 12-15

For your information

Knowing that he will not be permitted to enter the Promised Land, Moses delivers a long address to the Israelites, reviewing what God asks of them. This passage elaborates on one of the Ten Commandments.

Questions

1. How does God define what it means to keep the Sabbath? Who is included in observing it?
2. What is the basis of the Sabbath commandment, in the story of Israel's Exodus?

II Corinthians 4: 5-12

Questions

1. What does Paul believe to be his central proclamation? What has qualified him to give this message? What specifically might he mean, that people can see that this treasure is "in clay pots"? Why is this important? How might it suggest the way that other teachers have been behaving?
2. What do you understand from each of the pairs of conditions in vss. 7-10? How might each apparent contradiction be true? Do they apply to us?
3. Explain the paradoxes in vss. 11-12. How is death at work in Paul and his disciples? How is life at work in his listeners? Do you see the same process in our own teachers and ourselves?

Mark 2: 23-3: 6

For your information

Here Jesus is seen to be in apparent violation of the Sabbath. The Pharisees are scholars with particular concern for interpreting and preserving the law; they usually enjoyed arguing over Scripture, but in that time of serious threat from the Romans, they tended to be much more scrupulously orthodox. In fact, there was more flexibility than suggested here; generally, healing on the Sabbath was permitted.

Herod is the Jewish king, relatively powerless under Roman occupation; Herodians would be his supporters.

Questions

1. What story does Jesus tell to support his grain-plucking from Scripture? What conclusion does he draw?
2. How does he challenge the Pharisees about healing on the Sabbath? Why don't they answer his question? Why do they then react so strongly?]

Proper 5: June 6

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

Ps 138

or Genesis 3: 8-15

Ps 130

II Corinthians 4: 13-5: 1

Mark 3: 20-35

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

For your information

These passages reflect a turning point in Israel's history. The experience of the Exodus had persuaded Israel that God would win all her battles for her, and over time, this belief created another one: that building strong armies with chariots, as neighboring tribes had done, would mean that they no longer trusted God. But others argued that Israel must have a king and mighty armies, for defense against her enemies.

Samuel has become Israel's leading "judge," with authority to take major action in God's name.

Questions

1. What did the elders ask of their leader Samuel? How does he react to this demand?
2. What does God tell Samuel about this matter? How does God interpret Israel's behavior? What warnings does Samuel give them, on God's orders? Is this indeed what kings do? Why are they still insistent?

If you have time

--Read the chapters between these two passages, for the tragic-comic story about the choice of Saul as Israel's first king. Look for the ambivalence in it, evidence that two perspectives have been imperfectly merged into one story.

Genesis 3: 8-15

Questions

1. What sense do we get of God in this conversation? Of the man and the woman? How does each of them respond to God's questions? Whose fault is it?
2. What judgments does God pronounce? Do they match the offenses? What aspects of life on earth do they "explain"?

II Corinthians 4: 13-5: 1

Questions

1. How does Paul understand the connection between believing and speaking? What is the belief that impels him to speak, and why? Do you feel the same connection in your life?
2. What makes it possible for Paul to keep going, in spite of suffering? What does he depend on for reassurance?

Mark 3: 20-35

For your information

Jesus has been curing and casting out demons, and drawn great crowds, and has now appointed disciples to do the same.

Beelzebul is the king of the demons.

Questions

1. What do Jesus' family think of his actions? Why? Is this the way families behave toward their extraordinary members?

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Proper 6: June 13

I Samuel 15: 34-16: 13

Ps 20

or Ezekiel 17: 22-2

Ps 92: 1-4, 11-14

2 Corinthians 5: [1-5] 6-10, (11-13), 14-17

Mark 4: 26-34

I Samuel 15: 34-16: 13

For your information

Samuel anointed Saul king over Israel, as God commanded. But Saul was burdened with “inventing” the meaning of kingship, and though he won significant victories, he made some serious mistakes. God told him to “utterly destroy” an enemy army, but Saul saved its king Agag, and kept the best of its animals to sacrifice. God saw this as disobedience, and through Samuel told Saul that he regretted making him king: “to obey is better than sacrifice.” Samuel “hewed Agag in pieces.”

Questions

1. What is Samuel's reaction to Saul's disgrace? What attitude does God commend to him? What sort of god is this?
2. What is Samuel's next assignment? Who is Jesse, and where does he live? Why do the elders of the city tremble at Samuel's presence?
3. What standard does Samuel seem to use to identify God's anointed? How does God correct him? What seems to be the standard that marks David?

Ezekiel 17: 22-24

For your information

Ezekiel's writings as both priest and prophet spanned the fall of Jerusalem and the start of the Babylonian exile, 587 B.C.

The cedar tree appears often in Hebrew Scripture. Its trunk is tall and very straight.

Questions

1. Taken line by line, how does this passage become an allegory for the sort of leader that Israel should expect? Does it seem to describe Saul? David? Jesus?

2. How does God demonstrate particular power, in v. 24? Have you experienced God's actions this way?

2 Corinthians 5: [1-5] 6-10, (11-13), 14-17

For your information

Paul was always aware of the tension between a Jewish way of understanding--flesh and spirit all one, created by God--and the Greek culture in which he moved, with its sense that flesh held the spirit captive.

By this time, Paul had suffered imprisonment and apparently recurrent or chronic physical ailments as well. In places, this letter suggests that he was worried about other Christian teachers who were not so burdened, and were attracting converts away from Paul.

Questions

1. What are the implications of speaking of the body as an "earthly tent"? Is that your sense of your own body? Does it cause you to "groan" for release from it? Why, or why not?

2. Why do we not wish to be "unclothed," to be "found naked"? With what will God further clothe us? How can "what is mortal" be "swallowed up by life"? What does "life" mean in this context?

3. Does your body somehow keep you "away from the Lord"? If so, does it seem that this distance is a reason why we sin, and that therefore the body is by definition a cause of sinfulness? Why is Paul so insistent that our judgment will be for evil done "in the body"?

4. How may Paul's followers "boast" about him and his companions to skeptical outsiders? How has Christ's resurrection changed everything about how he looks at other people? What does it mean to regard someone "from a human point of view"? Why is that no longer adequate?

5. V. 17 makes a sweeping statement about the new reality that has come through Christ. How do you understand it?

Mark 4: 26-34

For your information

As v. 33 notes, Jesus told many parables to suggest aspects of the kingdom of God. Each one hints at one aspect of it.

Questions

1. What do we learn about God's kingdom in vs. 26-29? What examples can you think of to illustrate this scattering of seed and sudden, mysterious growth?

2. What do vs. 30-32 add to this picture? Can you find examples to illustrate this piece? What elements match the reading from Ezekiel? What elements are different? Is the mustard seed's shrub in danger of ending up like the cedar of Lebanon?

Proper 7: June 20

I Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

Ps 9: 9-20

or I Samuel 17: 57-18: 5, 10-16

Ps 133

or Job 38: 1-11, 16-18

Ps 107: 1-3, 23-32

2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

Mark 4: 35-41 [5: 1-20]

I Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

For your information

Saul is now tormented by “evil spirits,” because of what God considers disobedience, and when he hears of a young shepherd boy who is skilled in playing the lyre, sends for David, who gives him the relief he needs.

Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, is about ten feet tall. David is still only a boy.

Questions

1. What details emphasize Goliath’s enormous size? What sort of opponent does he call for, and on what terms for the victor?
2. What is Saul’s first response to choosing David? What makes David confident? Why does he reject Saul’s armor? What does he choose for weapons instead?
3. What sort of rhetoric does Goliath use against David? How does David respond?

I Samuel 17: 57-18: 5, 10-16 (and read 6-9)

For your information

Here is an example of a story that is told twice, apparently from two different traditions. Notice that this version contradicts vv. 32-40, but is consistent with 16: 1-13.

Questions

1. What is the significance of Saul’s question and David’s answer, especially to Jews long familiar with Isaiah 11: 1?
2. Trace the dramatic development of this story, step by step. What very human tensions begin here? What do we learn about Saul, Israel’s first king (see above), about his son Jonathan, about the young David, about Saul’s subject people? Where is God in this drama?

Job 38: 1-11, [16-18]

For your information

The familiar story of Job concerns a faithful man who unwittingly becomes the object of a bet between God and Satan (Hebrew: “accuser” or “adversary”): if Job’s happy life is suddenly struck with terrible, undeserved suffering, will he remain faithful, or curse God instead? Job loses everything he loves, and his friends argue that it’s somehow his fault, but he vows that he is blameless. This passage is the beginning of God’s answer to Job’s anguished question: Why?

Questions

1. What is God’s answer to Job’s question? Does it satisfy you? Is this the God you know? Does this passage show God reconciling a man to himself (see II Cor below)?
2. Do you think Jesus would give a similar answer to someone suffering undeserved pain?
3. What is there about this passage that might provide a basis for the journey to come?

2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

For your information

This second letter to the Corinthians comes late in Paul’s ministry, and shows his continuing concern for a congregation which is apparently given to errors in understanding and behavior.

Questions

1. As you read this passage, what hints do you get of the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians? What is preventing its fulfillment?
2. How do we “work together with “God? What would it mean to “accept the grace of God in vain”?
3. What has changed, according to Paul, since the words of II Isaiah in v. 2? How have he and his disciples prepared themselves, and commended themselves, for this new day?
4. How do you explain each of the paradoxes in vss. 8-10? Is this also the condition of Christians today?

Mark 4: 35-41 (5: 1-20)

For your information

This section follows several examples of Jesus’ teaching, and takes us suddenly into a world of miracles. It is possible that the literal events have been heightened for effect, through the addition of dramatic details; this was a common practice at the time, since “truth” lay in the story’s essential meaning, not in its literal accuracy. The setting is the Sea of Galilee, which figures in many stories about Jesus. The Decapolis is “a federation of about ten cities in eastern Palestine” (NOAB). A legion is 4,000 to 6,000 men. Swine were considered unclean animals.

Questions

1. What powers of Jesus are illustrated in these two stories? What details suggest that he is simply an extraordinary human being, and which ones indicate his divinity?

2. What is the relationship between the disciples and Jesus in the boat? What is the relationship between the demoniac and Jesus? Are there any similarities?
3. Why do the neighbors want Jesus to leave in a hurry? Why does the demoniac beg to come with him? Why does Jesus refuse?
4. What is the effect of putting these two episodes early in Jesus' ministry, between far less spectacular sections? What is added to our sense of the journey we're on?

If you have time

--Compare Mk 4: 35-41 to Mt 8: 18, 23-27; Lk 13: 18-19.

--Compare Mk 5: 1-20 to Mt 8: 28-34, Lk 8: 26-39.

--Compare Mk 5: 7 to Mk 1: 24; what consistencies do you find?

Proper 8: June 27

II Samuel 1: 1, 7-27

Ps 130

or Wisdom 1: 13-15; 2: 23-24

Ps 30 *or* Lamentations 3: 21-33

II Corinthians 8: [1-6], 7-15

Mark 5: 21-43

II Samuel 1: 1, 7-27

For your information

Saul has turned on David, forcing him to flee and find allies elsewhere. About to be defeated in battle with the Philistines, his sons already killed, Saul has taken his own life.

Questions

1. What news does the young Amalekite bring to David of Saul's death and his part in it? What is David's response? What does this show about David?
2. In his lamentation for Saul, what picture does David draw of Saul and his life, of Jonathan and their friendship? Why is there no hint of Saul's enmity toward David? What does this song of grief suggest about Israel's future king?

Wisdom 1: 13-15; 2: 23-24

For your information

Though ascribed to Solomon, the book of Wisdom probably dates from the late First Century BCE. Until then, immortality had not been part of Hebrew tradition.

In Hebrew Scripture, "righteousness" means being in a right relationship with God.

Questions

According to these passages, what is the relationship between death and life? What are God's intentions for us? How did death come to be? Who experiences it?

Lamentations 3: 21-33

For your information

The book of Lamentations expresses a community's grief over the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.

Questions

1. What situation does this passage seem to address? For whom would it be helpful? Is it helpful for you?

II Corinthians 8: [1-6], 7-15

For your information

At this time the Jerusalem church was apparently experiencing severe poverty. Paul thought that it might heal the growing division between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles if the churches outside Jerusalem were to take up a collection and send it to Jerusalem (cf. I Cor. 16: 1-4). It seems that the Corinthians were initially "eager" to help, or said they were. It has continued to be traditional to send the offering from Good Friday to the church in Jerusalem.

Some scholars believe that this section was from a separate letter, and inserted later.

Questions

1. Paul might be said to be conducting the first recorded Christian stewardship campaign! What techniques of persuasion does he use? What is his theology of giving--i.e. what does it have to do with our relationship with God? What are his arguments for giving? Do you think they would be appropriate at Good Shepherd?

Mark 5: 22-24, 35b-43 (and read the verses in between as well)

For your information

The Greek words translated here as "healing" and "arising" are the same word used for salvation and resurrection.

A woman who was bleeding was considered unclean; her uncleanliness was thought to rub off on anyone who touched her.

Questions

1. What details in this section suggest how Jesus is now seen by the public? How much do they seem to understand of who he is? What do they want from him? What is the significance of Jairus' position?

2. What does the story of Jairus' daughter tell us about Jesus and how he worked? What sense do you get of his way of responding to people? What is the importance of each half of v. 43?

3. What do we learn about Jesus from the story of the hemorrhaging woman? Why does she come before him “in fear and trembling”?

4. What do these two healings have in common? How are they different? Why do you think the author “interrupted” the story about Jairus with that of the woman? How would you compare them with the two miracles read last week? How do you think they are related to the OT lesson?

Proper 9: July 4

II Samuel 5: 1-5, 9-10

Ps 48

or Ezekiel 2: 1-5 [6-7]

Ps 123

2 Corinthians 12: 2-10

Mark 6: 1-13

II Samuel 5: 1-5, 9-10

For your information

Capturing Jerusalem meant eliminating the last center of Canaanite power, and gave David a capital that was between the two parts of the kingdom, Israel and Judah. The Millo seems to be an earthwork south of the Temple area (NRSV).

Questions

1. Why do the Israelites call David to be their king? What sort of king makes a covenant with his people?
2. What part did David play in the development of Jerusalem? What name did he give it?

Ezekiel 2: 1-5 [6-7]

For your information

Ezekiel was a priest and prophet in Israel just before and then during the exile. Ezekiel’s vision warns of what is to come.

Questions

1. What does this passage tell you about the relationship between God and Israel at this time?
2. What are the implications of v. 5? How would a people who refuse to hear still know that there is a prophet among them? Is it the same for us?
3. How do these words speak to Jesus and the disciples? How do they speak to us?

2 Corinthians 12: 2-10

For your information

This passage comes from the middle of a segment in which Paul chastises the Corinthians for turning away from him, perhaps because he has seemed weak and foolish to them, and toward some “super-apostles.” He has been defending himself, in part by describing his humble suffering in service to them.

“The third heaven” is an image of ultimate ecstasy.

It is generally believed that Paul is really talking about himself, though in the third person. The “thorn” in his flesh may be a literal physical impairment, or a figurative expression describing his opponents.

Questions

1. What experience is described here? Why can it not be told? Why do you think Paul includes it at this point? If it really is his own experience, why doesn't he say so?
2. How does Paul explain the thorn in his flesh? What is its purpose? How did God respond when he prayed for its removal? Do you think God works this way?
3. How does Paul explain the paradox of v. 10b? Do you agree?

Mark 6: 1-13

For your information

Traveling missionaries were common at this time. They depended on local hospitality for their care, and would usually receive it, because of the strong tradition of hospitality among people whose ancestors had needed to depend on strangers for their survival. A contemporary document suggests that missionaries are to be welcomed for a day or two, but one who stays beyond that time is probably a false prophet, a “mooch”!

Questions

1. Clearly Jesus' ministry has already been going on for awhile; we have already heard about several dramatic episodes and about gathering crowds. What purpose does this scene serve in the story?
2. What are Jesus' “rules” for effective discipleship? How do you account for the rule stated in v. 11? Does it fit all missionary situations, or would you want to make some exceptions?
3. What authority did Jesus give his disciples? Why do you think he sent them out two by two? What new stage in his ministry does this represent?
4. What equipment does he prescribe for them? Why?
5. What directions does he give for their shelter? What are they to do when they are not welcomed? Why?

Proper 10: July 11

II Samuel 6: 1-5, 12b-19

Ps 24

or Amos 7: 7-15
Ps 85: 8-13
Ephesians 1: [1-2] 3-14
Mark 6: 14-29

II Samuel 6: 1-5, 12b-19

For your information

Until that time, the ark had been “the sacred object of the northern tribes” (NRSV), and had been captured and held briefly by the Philistines. Bringing it to Jerusalem would unite the parts of Israel and establish Jerusalem as its center.

Michal is Saul’s daughter and David’s wife.

An ephod is a linen apron similar to a loincloth.

Questions

1. What sort of ceremony accompanies the ark on its journey? On its arrival?
2. How does David behave on the way? Why is Michal horrified? Is she right? What sort of king is this?

Amos 7: 7-15

For your information

Amos was a prophet during the reign of King Jeroboam, which was long, peaceful, and prosperous. His call was to warn a self-satisfied, complacent nation that there were serious problems in Israel’s conduct toward God, and that there would be severe consequences. He was unusual in that he prophesied not in his own homeland, Judah, the southern part of the kingdom, but in the north: to King Jeroboam himself.

A plumb line always hangs straight and true, and so reveals the crookedness around it. By this time, the office of king’s prophet, which had been filled with great integrity by Nathan and others, had become corrupted; court prophets didn’t speak unpleasant truths, and here the king’s priest is the one charged with banning the messenger.

Questions

1. What exactly might a plumb line reveal in Israel? in our own country? Do you have anything that acts as a plumb line in your life?
2. What is Amos’ response to Amaziah? Why are the details of his biography (v. 14) relevant?

Ephesians 1: 1-14

For your information

Stylistic differences suggest that this “letter” was written by one of Paul’s close followers; and it may originally not have been a letter at all but a collection of Pauline material woven together into a teaching message for several young churches.

Questions

1. What themes from other letters by Paul do you find summarized here?
2. This is a packed passage! What themes do you find in it? Do you recognize any of them from other Pauline letters? What references to important events does it contain? Does it seem appropriate as a prologue to a letter? What purpose[s] do you think it serves?

Mark 6: 14-29

For your information

The writings of Josephus, a First Century Jewish historian, differ considerably in detail from Mark’s version, but confirm the essence of the story. Herod (Antipas) is a son of the King Herod who ruled at Jesus’ birth. Herod Antipas was technically a tetrarch (a sort of weak Jewish governor), not a king; according to Josephus, Herodias was married not to Philip but to Herod Antipas’ other brother, also named Herod; Philip was married to Salome. According to some biblical manuscripts, it was Herodias’ daughter (remembered in the tradition as Salome), not Herodias, and not Herod’s daughter either, who asked for John’s head. Josephus says that John was executed because he was becoming a political threat to Herod.

Questions

1. What is being said about Jesus as his renown spreads? Why is he identified with each of these figures?
2. Why has Herod beheaded John? What does v. 21 show about Herod’s ambivalence? What finally persuades him? What do we see of human nature in this story, particularly as it relates to prophets?

Proper 11: July 18

II Samuel 7: 1-14a

Ps 89: 20-37

or Jeremiah 23: 1-6

Ps 23

Ephesians 2: 11-22

Mark 6: 30-34, [35-44], 53-56

II Samuel 7: 1-14a

For your information

This passage reflects Israel’s nomadic past and then the start of a movement toward a more stable future. A tabernacle is portable, like a tent.

Questions

1. What intentions does David state to his prophet Nathan about the ark's home? Why would he make that choice?
2. What is God's response? What purposes does God have for Israel? According to this view, what has changed? What are the implications of that change? What promises does God make to David and his descendants? How might these promises be understood by faithful Jews centuries later?

Jeremiah 23: 1-6

For your information

In spite of grave threats from foreign nations (and eventually the Exile), Jeremiah spoke to Israel not only of warnings but of hope at the end.

Questions

1. Through Jeremiah's words, what future does God promise for Israel? Who is responsible for their present state?
2. Who will restore them, and how? How will the new leader reflect the ways of David?

Ephesians 2: 11-22

For your information

We have read many other passages from Paul's own letters in which he strove to carry out his mission to the Gentiles, i.e. non-Jews. The first "converts" to Christianity were Jews, who brought their entire tradition with them, and understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of Israel's hopes. The demarcation between Jews and Gentiles was vividly demonstrated by a wall on the outskirts of the Jerusalem temple; Gentiles were required to stay outside it, on pain of death. A particular issue was whether Gentile converts had to go through the rituals of Judaism to be prepared for baptism, or to be considered observant Christians. Circumcision was the mark by which male Jews were committed to God (cf. Gen 17: 10-14). Gentiles were not circumcised.

Questions

1. According to this passage, what was the condition of Gentiles before Christ? What did Jews already have that Gentiles did not? What was the "dividing wall," i.e. the cause of hostility between them?
2. How exactly did Christ break down this hostility? What is the basis of the unity that now exists between "those who were far off" and "those who were near"?
3. If Gentiles do not need to become Jews first in order to be Christians, why does this passage say that this new "household of God" is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets"?

Mark 6: 30-34, [35-44], 53-56

For your information

The four steps in feeding the crowd—"took," "blessed," "broke," "gave"--are understood as the basic pattern of what we now know as Holy Eucharist. (Cf. BCP, last two lines of p. 334.)

Questions

1. The appointed Gospel reading describes the apostles' return from their first missionary expedition, for which Jesus had prepared them in last week's reading. What impression do vs. 30-33 give of their work's effect, and of Jesus' growing reputation?
2. What is Jesus' immediate response to their excited narratives? What happens then? What do we learn about Jesus in v. 34?
3. How would you compare the apostles' proposal about finding supper with Jesus' own actions? What analogies can you find in your experience? Would you have reacted as the apostles did, or as Jesus did? What's the difference?
4. In addition to the four steps of feeding, what other similarities to our Eucharist can you find here?
5. What is the effect of placing John's death between the apostles' departure and return? What is there in that harrowing tale that is an implicit commentary on their work?

How do vss. 53-56 build a sense of Jesus' overwhelming renown? What is he famous for? Will this continue to be the most important part of his ministry?

Proper 12: July 25

II Samuel 11: 1-15
Ps 14
or II Kings 4: 42-44
Ps 145: 10-19
Ephesians 3: 14-21
John 6: 1-21

II Samuel 11: 1-15

For your information

Joab is David's general. The Hittites were a tribe who had settled in Israel and, by David's time, adopted Hebrew names. Uriah would have gone with Joab to battle. Soldiers consecrated for battle were required to remain celibate.

The superscription to Ps 51 says it is David's song of repentance for the events in this story.

Questions

How does v. 1 set up the story to come?

What is David's purpose in sending Uriah home? How is it foiled? Why does David make him drunk?

II Kings 4: 42-44

Questions

1. Elisha, Elijah's successor, replicated many of his master's deeds. What future event do you see prefigured in this story? What might that tell us about the continuity in Israel's prophetic figures?

Ephesians 3: 14-21

For your information

"Pater" means "father"; "patria" means "fatherhood" or "family." The writer is playing on the Greek words.

Vss. 20-21 are used to close Morning Prayer. (See BCP p. 102.)

Questions

1. How is God the father of human families?
2. What are the writer's hopes for the Ephesians? What does it mean to be "rooted and grounded in love"? To know "the breadth and length and height and depth..." of what?

John 6: 1-21

Questions

1. Why are the crowds following Jesus? What are they seeing "signs" of? (See also v. 14.)
2. What does Jesus do to get away? Does it work?
3. What do vss. 5-6 intend us to understand about Jesus? What is the difference between his disciples' response to the crisis and his own? What phrases in the story may have symbolic importance?
4. What are the intentions of the crowd toward Jesus? Why? Why does he not comply? What do vss. 16-21 show about his sort of power?

****The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ: August 6 (Used as readings for Sunday when August 6 falls on a Sunday)**

Exodus 34: 29-35

Ps 99

2 Peter 1: 13-21

Luke 9: 18-36

Exodus 34: 29-35

For your information

The Exodus story is understood in Jewish tradition as the pattern for understanding how God's mind works. Each stage in it--captivity, inexplicable freedom, wilderness journey, promised land--is replicated again and again in Israel's "salvation history," and is identified by Christians as the pattern of the Christ story as well. In particular, Moses is seen to be a prefiguring of Jesus. His time on Mt. Sinai with God lasts "forty days and forty nights"; at the end of it, he receives the Ten Commandments.

Questions

1. We are told that Moses= face shone after seeing God. Have you seen people with “shining faces”? Do we mean the same thing by that? If so, what is the cause? What gives that effect?
2. Why were the Israelites afraid to come near Moses after his encounter with God? Was there good reason for their fear? How was it overcome?

2 Peter 1: 13-21

For your information

This letter claims Peter as author, but was probably written much later, since it refers to the consolidation of Paul’s letters and other First Century writing as Scripture. It is a strong response to those who deny the coming judgment; it reasserts the apostolic tradition and its correct teaching, with an emphasis on remembering Christ’s gifts to us and the godly behavior we owe in return..

Questions

1. What are the things about which the writer thinks it necessary to “refresh the memory” of his readers? Why are these particular points essential?
2. What authority does the writer claim as their teacher? Is this kind of authority important to you?
3. What does it mean to have “the morning star [rise] in your heart”? Have you had that experience?
4. How do you understand vss. 20-21? Does this argument convince you?

Luke 9: 18-36

For your information

There is much debate about whether Jesus thought of himself as the messiah or the Son of Man. Both of those concepts were current in his time, though “Son of Man” could mean just “a human being,” and would only later take on clear divine overtones. The close identification here may be an editor’s work.

Questions

1. What guesses are being made about Jesus’ identity? What is Peter’s guess? What do you think Peter means? How does Jesus redefine the meaning of “Messiah”?
2. What does Jesus expect of his followers? Why?
3. What prophecy does he seem to make in v. 22? How would you explain it?
4. How is Jesus transformed in this story/vision? What earlier stories might be echoed here? To what effect?
5. Who are the mystical figures who join the little group on the mountaintop? Why these two in particular?

6. What is their conversation about? What seems to be its tone, its purpose?
- 7 How do the three disciples appear in this description? How do they respond to what they see?
8. How does this vision affect the events that follow it, if at all? Why do they all keep silence about it?

Proper 13: August 1

II Samuel 11: 26-12: 13a
Ps 51: 1-13
or Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15
Ps 78: 23-29
Ephesians 4: 25-5: 2
John 6: 24-35

II Samuel 11: 26-12:13a

For your information

David has ordered Joab to set Uriah on the front line, where he has been killed.

Kings often had prophets at their side to give them advice. Bad kings had bad prophets, who told them only what they wanted to hear. But Nathan was a faithful prophet, who told the truth.

Questions

1. What does David's behavior with regard to Bathsheba and Uriah show about him?
2. What is the point of Nathan's parable? How does he interpret it for David? What future does he prophesy for David's house?
3. What is David's response? How might he have responded instead? What do we learn about him? How is this consistent, or not, with what we have seen of him before?

Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15

For your information

The Israelites have now been traveling for about 1 1/2 months. The wilderness of Sin is quite far south on the Sinai Peninsula; this is hardly a direct route!

"Fleshpots" are pots for cooking meat.

Questions

1. How do the Israelites behave, now that they're good and hungry? Does this seem to you to be typical human behavior in such a situation? Where else have you seen people act like that?

2. What test does God plan for them? Why does God design it that way? Does God usually act like that, in Scripture or in your experience?

If you have time

--Read the rest of the chapter. Does Israel “pass the test”? What, if anything, do the people learn in the process?

Ephesians 4: 1-16

For your information

V. 4 is used as a preface to our baptismal service. (BCP p. 299).

Questions

1. What do you think is meant by “the calling to which you have been called”?
2. What is “the unity of the Spirit”? Why is it essential for Christians?
3. How did Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension “[make] captivity itself a captive”?
4. What sorts of diverse gifts did he give to his people? How are we to maintain unity in spite of all these differences? What should be our goal? What are the obstacles? What does it mean to “[speak] the truth in love”? How will that help?

John 6: 24-35

For your information

This is John’s version of what follows the feeding of the multitudes and Jesus’ walking on the water; we are moving back and forth between John’s Gospel and Mark’s. In years A and C, we don’t do that during this season, but Mark is too short to fill all those Sundays!

John has Jesus traveling all the way from Jerusalem to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, where the feeding takes place--a very long journey. Then the disciples cross to Capernaum, on the far northwestern tip of the lake. The geography is odd enough that John might have some symbolic point in mind.

Questions

1. As usual in John, a question (v. 25) receives a cryptic answer from Jesus (v. 26). How does he interpret and answer their question? Do they get the point?
2. What seems to prompt the disciples’ question in v. 28? What do they hope for? How does Jesus answer them? Do you think they are satisfied with that answer?
3. What do they ask for then? How does Jesus comment on the story about manna in the wilderness, to clarify who he is?

4. Consider the sequence we've just seen, from the feeding to this encounter. How has John adapted material found in other Gospels, changing particular details, in order to build a highly developed understanding of Jesus?]

Proper 14: August 8

II Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33

Ps 130

or I Kings 19: 4-8

Ps 34: 1-8

Ephesians 4: 25-5: 2

John 6: 35, [36-40], 41-51

II Samuel 18: 5-9, [10-14], 15, 31-33

For your information

David's first child by Bathsheba has died, apparently as punishment for their illicit liaison. Absalom is the second, and seems to illustrate the judgments placed by God on David's house. He has turned against his father and plans a battle to destroy him. Joab, Abishai and Ittai are David's commanders.

Questions

1. How can a forest claim "more victims... than the sword"? How did it claim Absalom? How did his life end? Why?

2. When a messenger brings word of Absalom's death, why does he call it "good news"? How does David respond? What do we learn about him? What sort of king are we seeing?

I Kings 19: 4-8

For your information

After some spectacular successes against the prophets of Baal, Elijah has received a threatening message from Queen Jezebel, and has fled for his life.

Questions

1. How does Elijah react to Jezebel's threat? Why?

2. What sort of care does he receive from the angel? What does he do then? Why? Is he ready for leadership?

Ephesians 4: (25-29) 30-5: 2

For your information

Eph. 5:2 is one of the BCP=s offertory sentences.

Questions

1. This passage has a list of “commandments” for a Christian life. What are they? How do you see them as applying to the specifics of your life?
2. The Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17) might also be understood as describing how we are to live in love with God and our neighbor. What do these two lists of prescriptions have in common? How are they different?
3. How do vs. 4:32-5:2 add a specifically Christian dimension to these commandments?

John 6: 37-51

For your information

This passage is a fine example of John’s working with the material in Mark, Matthew and Luke, to shape it into a clear revelation of the risen Christ.

Questions

1. How does this passage further develop the theme of Jesus as the “bread of life”? How does John continue to build on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness?
2. What echoes of 6:12 might we hear in 6: 39?
3. What are the similarities between the behavior toward Jesus of the people of Nazareth (Mt 13:54-58, Mk 6:1-6a, or Lk 4:16-30) and John’s characterization of “the Jews” in 6: 41-42? Why do you think that John might have changed the reference from Nazarenes alone to Jews in general? (Hint: Compare Jn 1: 11.)

Proper 15: August 15

5I Kings 2: 10-12; 3: 3-1

Ps 111

or Proverbs 9: 1-6

Ps 34: 9-14

Ephesians 5: 15-20

John 6: 51-58

I Kings 2: 10-12, 3: 3-14

For your information

Solomon is God’s choice, and David’s, to be David’s successor, and has become so in spite of opposition. His marriage to a daughter of Pharaoh (3:1), a pagan, instead of a Jew, warns of trouble to come.

Questions

How does Samuel present himself to God? What grounds does he have for counting on God’s favor? What does he ask God for? Is it the right request, in God’s eyes? Is it granted?

Proverbs 9: 1-6

For your information

The book of Proverbs comes from a time in Israel's history when the great hopes for a glorious future had fallen victim to repeated invasion, destruction, and exile. It was believed that the prophets were gone, and that the best one could do was to get along from day to day, as well as possible.

Questions

1. How would you characterize this personified "Lady Wisdom"? Does "she" have any of the qualities of a messianic figure? What sort of wisdom is this? What sort of food is offered at this meal of "bread" and "wine"?

Ephesians 5: 15-20

Questions

1. Here's more talk about wisdom! Is the word used in the same way as in Proverbs? Is the tone similar, or different? What sort of wine is spoken of here? What does it mean to be wise?

John 6: 51-58

For your information

Here is yet another of John's typical patterns: the bewildered (or maybe sometimes scornful) question, followed by Jesus' answer at quite a different level--showing how much the questioners have missed the point.

It isn't certain whether these words are Jesus' own, or a later understanding of his meaning. In either case, they are rich in poetry and dramatic metaphor.

Questions

1. Can the words of vss. 56-58 be true without being historically accurate? What truths, about Jesus' life and his relationship with God and us, might they carry regardless of their factuality?

2. We use some of this language in the Prayer of Humble Access in the Eucharist, Rite I. What does it mean to you, to "eat [his] flesh" and "drink his blood"? How does it shape your understanding of Holy Eucharist? Do you think it applies to any other context of our lives?

3. Paraphrase v. 54. What implications do you think it has for the importance of the sacraments in church life?

4. Paraphrase v. 56. How do you understand it? Do you experience the Eucharist that way?

5. For many churchgoers, this language is offensively physical, some say "primitive" or "crude." What do you think?

6. Compare and contrast the three passages appointed for today. How does each of them, and then the combination, speak to us as we keep walking along this long post-Pentecost road with Jesus?

Proper 16: August 22

I Kings 8: (1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43

Ps 84

or Joshua 24: 1-2a, 14-18 [19-25]

Ps 34: 15-22

Ephesians 6: 10-20

John 6: 56-69

I Kings 8: (1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43

For your information

David chose not to build a house for the ark, but kept it in a tabernacle/tent. Solomon has now built a grand Temple in Jerusalem, again raising the question of whether God is to be put in a box. Once this temple was established as Israel's ritual center, there were no other temples; other places of worship and teaching were called "synagogues," and the use of a capital letter for this Temple marked its uniqueness.

The ark, containing the stone tablets which bear the Ten Commandments, is put in the "inner sanctuary."

Questions

1. What is the covenant with David that Solomon quotes God as making? How does he believe it has been fulfilled on this day? What part does the ark seem to play in that?
2. At the end of Solomon's long prayer, what special favor does Solomon ask for the foreigner who comes seeking Israel's name? What does it have to do with the Temple?

Joshua 24: 1-2a, [2b-13], 14-18 [19-25]

For your information

Shechem is about 25-30 miles north of Jerusalem. The Israelites have returned to Canaan, their "Promised Land," and Joshua, who has led them since Moses' death, has divided it among the twelve tribes. (According to archaeologists/historians, these tribes were mostly in Canaan all along, but were drawn together around a common altar because of the compelling story told by the former slaves who were their wandering relatives.) The worship of other gods, common in that part of the world, was a constant threat to Israel's monotheism.

Questions

1. This passage describes the making of a new covenant--an agreement between (sometimes extreme) unequals in which the more powerful promises care and protection in return for loyalty. What previous ones can you remember? What were the terms of each? Is there anything new about this one?
2. In vs. 2b-13, Joshua reviews Israel's history until now. Can you recognize each of the references in it? What sort of God is revealed in it?
3. What does Joshua say is his audience's appropriate response to this story? What critical choice does he give them? How do they answer him, and why?

4. Beginning in v. 19, what warning does Joshua give them? What sort of God does it suggest? Do you think it's a fair warning?

5. What, then, are the terms of the covenant made in v. 25?

If you have time

--Compare Gen 9:8-17 (Noah); Gen 12:1-3, 13:14-16, 17:1-14 (Abraham); Ex 19:3-6, 20:1-17, 34:10-12 (Moses) for previous covenants. What are the terms of each? Do you see a development?

Ephesians 6: 10-20

For your information

The writer—probably not Paul himself, but a follower—develops one of Paul's favorite metaphors.

Questions

1. These might be called further "directions for living," over the long haul. What assumptions does the author state about the context for this advice? What is the Christian's situation as he sees it?

2. A favorite Pauline image is that of armor for a war. What is "the whole armor of God"? What sort of armor is prescribed here? Does each piece of it fit how you understand your own efforts at faithfulness? Against what enemies does it provide protection? Does the image of war seem appropriate to you?

3. What does it mean to "[p]ray in the Spirit"? For whom does the writer ask prayers? What prayers does he ask for himself? Are there similar prayers that you would ask for yourself?

John 6: 56-69

Questions

1. Why does Jesus infer that his disciples are offended (v. 61)? Do you think they're offended, or just bewildered, or what? Does he often have this effect on people? What does v. 62 have to do with their state of mind? What is his meaning in v. 63, and what does it have to do with what he's just said? What does it have to do with our understanding of the Holy Eucharist as a sacrament—"an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace"?

2. How does the rest of the passage show the sorting-out process that is going on? What is Jesus' role in it? How does it compare with the sorting out that takes place in preparation for Joshua's covenant? How does it speak to us? How does it prepare for the events to come?

Proper 17: August 29

Song of Solomon 2: 8-13

Ps 45: 1-2, 7-10

or Deuteronomy 4: 1-2 [3-5] 6-9

Ps 15

James 1: 17-27

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Song of Solomon 2: 8-13

For your information

This book is a love poem, or series of love poems, traditional to Israel. Solomon's name appears in it, but it's unclear whether he was in fact the author. As it stands, it is only between a man and a woman, but the qualities of tenderness and fidelity led it to be read by both Jews and Christians as a parable of the love between God and Israel.

Questions

1. What image does the "woman" give us of her beloved? What does he say to her? Is this invitation like any you've heard elsewhere in the Bible?
2. What do you make of the inclusion of this book, as represented in this passage, in Holy Scripture? Is it necessary to "theologize" it, or can it be simply what it appears to be, a poem about human sexual love? And if so, does it belong in the Bible?

Deuteronomy 4: 1-2 [3-5] 6-9

For your information

The book of Deuteronomy contains three addresses by Moses to the people of Israel, who are about to enter the Promised Land without him.

Questions

1. Here we have the beginning of extended directions for living, now that the wilderness journey's climax is near. How does Moses underscore the importance of these "statutes and ordinances"? What effect will careful obedience to them have upon the other people of Canaan?
2. According to vs. 7-8, what is implied by the Israelites' possession of these laws? Do you see our legal system that way, or is there some other analogy for us?

James 1: 17-27

For your information

This letter, or collection of advice to a young Christian community, reflect similar Jewish writings but also the grace of Christ, and may be under the authority of James, Jesus' brother.

"Father of lights" means "creator of the heavenly bodies" (NRSV).

Questions

1. What does the writer see as the source of all our acts of generosity? Does it seem so to you?

2. What does it mean that we were given “birth by the word of truth”? How does it give us the potential to be “a kind of first fruits of his creation”?
3. What are the human traits that might get in the way of this potential?
4. What does v. 22 call us to be? How do you understand the image of the mirror and its deceptive powers? Into what should we look instead? What is the evidence of a truly religious person?

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (and read vs. 17-20)

For your information

The scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem were the most scrupulous of observant Jews--the scribes concerned especially with the Temple and religious practices, the Pharisees with Scriptural interpretation and authority. From their point of view, they were defending their faith against the encroachments of a pagan empire and the ugly compromises made by careless Jews. Meals were central to Jewish ritual practice, and were governed by many religious rules, including how food was to be prepared and what could not be eaten at all.

The quotation is from Is 29, as it appears in the Septuagint, a translation of Hebrew Scripture into Greek that was widely used among Greek-speaking Jews. (Sometimes it does not exactly match the available manuscripts of the Hebrew original.)

Questions

1. Now we return to Mark’s Gospel, after several weeks with John. This passage follows shortly after Jesus’ walking on the water, and subsequent widespread healings. How does the emphasis shift here? What differences do you see between Mark’s writing and John’s?
2. What can we infer about Mark’s intended audience, from vs. 3-4?
3. What is the effect of following 6:54-56 with this incident about the Pharisees and scribes? What do we learn about how Jesus is perceived in Galilee, vs. how the Jerusalem leaders see him? Is Jesus’ reproof of the latter justified, or can you find some reason to sympathize with them? How would you apply Jesus’ distinction between “the commandment of God” and “human tradition” to us?
4. How would you paraphrase Jesus’ radical teaching in vs. 14-15? How does he justify it in v. 19 ff.?

Proper 18: Sept. 5

Proverbs 22: 1-2, 8-9, 22-23
 Ps 125
or Isaiah 35: 4-7a
 Ps 146
 James 2: 1-10 (11-13) 14-17
 Mark 7: 24-37

Proverbs 22: 1-2, 8-9, 22-23

For your information

The book of Proverbs is a “collection of collections,” sayings and poems. Some of them may predate the Exile, but most of them probably originated later, during a long, hard period when the Spirit was thought to be gone from Israel. They offer sound advice for living from day to day.

Questions

1. What particular concerns are addressed in these short selections? What assumptions about God seem to lie behind them? Would Jesus have spoken like this?

Isaiah 35: 4-7a

For your information

This passage represents the pre-exilic Isaiah, who has spoken dire warnings about the suffering ahead for Israel but always follows with assurance of ultimate redemption.

Questions

1. What can you infer about the people to whom these words are addressed? Might they also apply to the disciples at this point on the journey? to us?

2. What images from Israel=s history does Isaiah renew here? How does he emphasize that salvation is God=s work alone, not within our power?

James 2: 1-10 (11-13), 14-17

1. Peter’s teaching, quoted in Acts 10:34, is the principle here. How have James= audience apparently violated it? Where do you see it violated in your daily life? In your church? In what ways do you think you show partiality?

2. According to vss. 6-7, what are some sensible reasons for not favoring the rich? Do you agree?

3. How might it be true that breaking this law of impartiality might undercut all other areas of lawfulness (v. 10)?

4. What sort of person seems to be the particular target of vss. 11-13? How does v. 13 sum up James’ theme? How would you apply this principle in specific situations you know of?

5. Vss. 14-18 take us back into the debate about the relationship between faith and works. What is James’ position here? Do you read it as contradicting Ephesians 2:4-10, or is it just refining that passage?

Mark 7: 24-37 (and read vs. 24-30)

For your information

Jesus is returning from a trip to the far north (Sidon and Tyre) to the more familiar region of the Sea of Galilee. He speaks in Aramaic, his own native language but apparently not that of Mark=s audience.

A Syrophenician woman is not a Jew, but a Gentile/pagan.

Questions

1. Here are two more of Jesus' healing miracles. Are they much like the ones we've already seen, or do they show us something new?
2. Why does the Syrophenician woman come to Jesus?
3. How would you describe their conversation? What is his first response? How does she challenge him? How does his response change? Why? What tone do you hear? Is this the Jesus you see in other stories about him?
4. Why do you think Jesus takes the deaf man "aside in private" to heal him, when apparently others have been healed in public?
5. Who is the "them" in v. 36? Why do they not do as Jesus orders them? Is their disobedience helpful or harmful?
6. Since vs. 24-30 are also about a healing miracle, why do you think they are left out? What do they add, if anything? Are they in any way a transition between what precedes and what follows?

If you have time

--Compare v. 28 with the "Prayer of Humble Access" (BCP, p. 337, bottom). Any thoughts?