

Bible Challenge May 28 – June 3, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

In these days between Ascension and Pentecost, we gather with the disciples in the upper room, waiting for the Spirit to transform the church around the world. In today's gospel Jesus prays for his followers and for their mission in his name. Amid religious, social, and economic divisions, we seek the unity that Jesus had with his Father. Made one in baptism, we go forth to live our faith in the world, eager for the unity that God intends for the whole human family.

DAY ONE: Acts 1:6-14

Today's reading is part of the introduction to the narrative of the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. These verses tell of the risen Lord's conversation with his disciples on the eve of his ascension.

⁶When [the apostles] had come together, they asked [Jesus], "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." ¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Adventure Challenge: Acts 1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Research any of the names or places that you are not familiar with.

Option B: Compare this story of the ascension (written by Luke) with that in Luke 24: 36-53.

DAY TWO: Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

Sing to God, who is father to orphans, who gives freedom to prisoners, and provisions the poor.

¹Let God arise, and let God's enemies be scattered;
let those who hate God flee.

²As smoke is driven away, so you should drive them away;
as the wax melts before the fire,
so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

³But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God;
let them also be merry and joyful.

⁴Sing to God, sing praises to God's name; exalt the one who rides the clouds;
I AM is that name, rejoice before God!

⁵In your holy habitation, O God,
you are a father to orphans, defender of widows;

⁶you give the solitary a home and bring forth prisoners into freedom;
but the rebels shall live in desert places.

⁷O God, when you went forth before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,

⁸the earth quaked, and the skies poured down rain,
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
⁹You sent a bountiful rain, O God;
you restored your inheritance when it languished.
¹⁰Your people found their home in it;
in your goodness, O God, you have made provision for the poor.
³²Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;
sing praises to the Lord.
³³You ride in the heavens, O God, in the ancient heavens;
you send forth your voice, your mighty voice.
³⁴Ascribe power to God,
whose majesty is over Israel; whose strength is in the skies.
³⁵How wonderful you are in your holy places, O God of Israel,
giving strength and power to your people! Blessed be God!

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 68.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Verses 1-3 are very similar to the Song of the Ark in Numbers. Read Numbers 10:35 and 1 Samuel 4:1-11 to learn more about how Israel used the Ark and sang this song.

Option B: From this psalm, list the actions (verbs) of God; compare them to what people (good and bad) do.

DAY THREE: 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Our faith in Christ does not make us immune from the scorn of others. Nevertheless, we are to resist the designs of evil when we experience disparagement from others, because we trust God's grace will strengthen and guide us.

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

^{5:6}Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Peter 4:12 – 5:14.

Explorer Challenge: Using a dictionary or any other research tool, explore the meaning of any of the key words or phrases in this passage; for example: *revile, humble, discipline, suffering, establish.*

DAY FOUR: John 17:1-11

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prays to his heavenly Father, asking that those who continue his work in this world will live in unity.

¹After Jesus had spoken these words [to his disciples], he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. ⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours,

and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

Adventure Challenge: John 17.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Research the meanings for the words *glory* and *glorify*.

Option B: This passage concludes with a request for unity; that unity contrasts with things in the passage (some stated, some only implied) that are in tension; identify principle tensions (separations) which unity will resolve.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, form the minds of your faithful people into your one will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that, amid all the changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

I will not leave you orphaned, says the Lord. I am coming to you. (*John 14:18*)

Adventure Challenge: Are there ways that you feel *orphaned*? How does Jesus respond to those feelings?

Explorer Challenge: Consider how The Prayer of the Day asks God to bring unity to parts of our lives that we often think of as quite separate: *mind vs. will; command vs. desire vs. promise; change vs fixed; truth vs joy.*