

Bible Challenge June 18 - 24, 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

Moses tells the Israelites that they are called to be a priestly kingdom and a holy people. Jesus sends out the disciples as laborers into the harvest. In baptism we too are anointed for ministry, sharing God's compassion with our needy world. From the Lord's table, we go forth to proclaim the good news, to heal the sick, and to share our bread with the hungry.

DAY ONE: Exodus 19:2-8a

At Sinai God assured Israel, "You shall be my treasured possession," and commissioned them to serve as mediating priests for the nations. The people commit themselves completely to God's will.

²[The Israelites] had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

⁷So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do."

Adventure Challenge: Exodus 19.

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Using a Bible map or other tools, identify Rephidim and trace the journey made by the Israelites from Egypt back to Palestine. Which locations have been proposed for Mount Sinai?

Option B: Read 1 Peter 5:1-12; identify the parallels with the Day One reading.

DAY TWO: Psalm 100

Serve the Lord with gladness; the Lord's love is everlasting.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all you lands!

²Serve the LORD with gladness; come into God's presence with a song.

³Know that the LORD is God, our maker to whom we belong;
we are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture.

⁴Enter the gates of the LORD with thanksgiving and the courts with praise;
give thanks and bless God's holy name.

⁵Good indeed is the LORD, whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from age to age.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 100. Compare with Psalm 97.

Explorer Challenge: The psalmist tells us to serve with *gladness* and approach the Lord with *thanksgiving*; think of other ways that Biblical writers counsel or describe when approaching or serving the Lord.

DAY THREE: Romans 5:1-8

We are no longer God's enemies but have peace with God, because we were brought into a right relationship with God through Christ's death. A tested character has been forged for us which empowers endurance in the midst of suffering and hope for final salvation.

¹Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we

have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Adventure Challenge: Option A: Romans 4:1 – 5:8. **Option B:** Romans 5.

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Compare Romans 5:1 with Exodus 19:5-6.

Option B: An alternative translation for the phrase *hope does not disappoint us* (verse 5) is *hope does not make us ashamed [at the final judgment]*. Re-read verses 3-5 and consider which translation seems best.

DAY FOUR: Matthew 9:35—10:8

The mission of Jesus' followers is to continue the mission of Jesus himself. Here, he instructs his first disciples how they might proclaim the gospel through their words and deeds.

³⁵Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." ^{10:1}Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 9:35 – 10:39.

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Research any one of the lesser-known disciples to learn what is known about their lives and what they did.

Option B. Jesus gives his disciples some rather specific (and curious) instructions in Matthew 10:5 – 15; research commentaries to see how we can understand or interpret these instructions.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of compassion, you have opened the way for us and brought us to yourself. Pour your love into our hearts, that, overflowing with joy, we may freely share the blessings of your realm and faithfully proclaim the good news of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

The kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news. (*Mark 1:15*)

Challenge: Consider prayerfully what you have been commissioned by Jesus and prepared by the Holy Spirit to do for the people whom God the Father created and loves.