

Bible Challenge - June 19 - 25, 2016

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 are 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

This Sunday's texts paint startling pictures of the horrific—the demonic—nature of sin. The church's repeated celebration of the holy communion counters that tragic reality in a continued showing forth of the death of Jesus "until he comes." It is a dramatic declaration of "how much God has done for you."

DAY ONE: Isaiah 65:1-9

The prophet announces God's impatience. The people's self-absorption is idolatry, and images from pagan worship fill this reading. Like a vintner who crushes the grape to release the wine, God will use Israel's exile to establish a new community of the faithful.

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask,
to be found by those who did not seek me.
I said, "Here I am, here I am,"
to a nation that did not call on my name.
²I held out my hands all day long
to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;
³a people who provoke me
to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens
and offering incense on bricks;
⁴who sit inside tombs,
and spend the night in secret places;
who eat swine's flesh,
with broth of abominable things in their vessels;
⁵who say, "Keep to yourself,
do not come near me, for I am too holy for you."
These are a smoke in my nostrils,
a fire that burns all day long.
⁶See, it is written before me:
I will not keep silent, but I will repay;
I will indeed repay into their laps
⁷their iniquities and their ancestors' iniquities together,
says the LORD;
because they offered incense on the mountains
and reviled me on the hills,
I will measure into their laps
full payment for their actions.
⁸Thus says the LORD:
As the wine is found in the cluster,
and they say, "Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it,"
so I will do for my servants' sake,
and not destroy them all.
⁹I will bring forth descendants from Jacob,
and from Judah inheritors of my mountains;

my chosen shall inherit it,
and my servants shall settle there.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 65. (Notice how Isaiah describes the “new earth” in verses 17–25. Is this “the good life” that you ask of God?)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Use a Bible commentary or references to understand why the actions described in verses 3, 4, 5, and 7 “provoke” God.

Option B: Research *Third Isaiah* to learn about the historical and social setting for Chapters 56-66 of Isaiah and how they differ from Second Isaiah.

DAY TWO: Psalm 22:19-28

Although frightened by threats (here pictured as a sword, dog, lion, and wild bulls), the Psalmist asserts confidence that God hears the cries of those in need and pledges to sing God’s praise.

¹⁹But you, O LORD, be not far away;
O my help, hasten to my aid.

²⁰Deliver me from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog.

²¹Save me from the lion's mouth!
From the horns of wild bulls you have rescued me.

²²I will declare your name to my people;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you.

²³You who fear the LORD, give praise! All you of Jacob's line, give glory.
Stand in awe of the LORD, all you offspring of Israel.

²⁴For the LORD does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty;
neither is the LORD's face hidden from them;
but when they cry out, the LORD hears them.

²⁵From you comes my praise in the great assembly;
I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the LORD.

²⁶The poor shall eat and be satisfied.
Let those who seek the LORD give praise!
May your hearts live forever!

²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;
all the families of nations shall bow before God.

²⁸For dominion belongs to the LORD,
who rules over the nations.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 22.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* The opening of this psalm is quoted in Matthew 27 and Mark 15 as some of the words Jesus spoke on the cross. Read the all of Psalm 22 to explore why Jesus’s thoughts might have turned, not just to the lines quoted, but to the whole psalm.

Option B. In place of a sword, dog, lion, and wild bulls, what words or images can you use to describe what frightens you and sometimes causes you to feel forsaken?

DAY THREE: Galatians 3:23-29

For Paul, baptism is a powerful bond that unites people not only with God but with other believers. Those who call themselves children of God experience a transformation that removes prejudices of race, social class, or gender in favor of true unity in Christ.

²³Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.

²⁴Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Adventure Challenge: Galatians 3 - 4:7.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Study Paul's discussion in Galatians 3 to determine how much is based on logic, how much on analogy, and how much on examples.

Option B. Paul uses Jew-Greek, slave-free, and male-female as examples of major social distinctions that "clothed" or separated people of his time. If Paul were writing a letter to the churches in Northern Virginia, what major distinctions might he identify that we regularly use to "clothe" people, but which through Christ, are not important?

DAY FIVE: Luke 8:26-39

Jesus' mission includes foreigners, and his authority extends to the casting out of demons. Some who witness Jesus' work are seized with confusion and fear, but the man who was healed is commissioned to give testimony of God's mercy and power.

²⁶Then [Jesus and his disciples] arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"—²⁹for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. ³¹They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³²Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country.

³⁵Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.

³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you. So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 8:4 – 56.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *Gerasenes* to determine where it is and whether there is any significance to the location of this event in relation to the events that immediately precede it (Luke 19 – 25). How important are the words *home*, *return*, *came*, and *send/went away*?

Option B. Research what the Greek word translated as "demon" meant in Jesus' time.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord God, we bring before you the cries of a sorrowing world. In your mercy set us free from the chains that bind us, and defend us from everything that is evil, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you. (Luke 8:29)

Explorer Challenge: Write a paragraph in answer to the Gospel Acclamation: “Declare how much God has done for you.” (It sometimes helps to actually put words down on a page.) You may want to limit your focus to what God has done for you today, this week, or through this week’s Bible Challenge.