

## Bible Challenge July 31 – August 6, 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 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

*Today's texts offer instruction and encouragement for all who are occasionally overwhelmed by the "unhappy business" of life. Jesus urges us to take care and be on guard against all kinds of greed. We who have died with Christ in holy baptism have also been raised with him and are encouraged to elevate our thinking, seeking the "things that are above." To that end we seek the sustenance of the Lord's supper and the encouragement of God's word.*

### DAY ONE: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

*The teacher of wisdom who wrote Ecclesiastes sees that working for mere accumulation of wealth turns life into an empty game, a "vanity of vanities." Nevertheless, he asserts in the next verse, it is good to find enjoyment in one's work because such enjoyment is a gift from God.*

<sup>2</sup>Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,  
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

<sup>12</sup>I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup>applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. <sup>14</sup>I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

<sup>2:18</sup>I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me <sup>19</sup>—and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. <sup>20</sup>So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun, <sup>21</sup>because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. <sup>22</sup>What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? <sup>23</sup>For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

**Adventure Challenge:** Ecclesiastes 1 - 2.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* Read an introduction to Ecclesiastes to learn the background and main themes of the book known for two famous sayings: "All is vanity." And "There is nothing new under the sun."

*Option B:* Research the different possible meanings for the Hebrew words *hevel*, usually translated "vanity," and *ra*, usually translated "evil."

### DAY TWO: Psalm 49:1-12

*A psalm of instruction that encourages everyone, rich and poor, to consider whether wealth and prestige are of lasting value.*

<sup>1</sup>Hear this, all you peoples;  
give ear, all you who dwell in the world,  
<sup>2</sup>you of high degree and low,  
rich and poor together.  
<sup>3</sup>My mouth shall speak of wisdom,  
and my heart shall meditate on understanding.  
<sup>4</sup>I will incline my ear to a proverb  
and set forth my riddle upon the harp.  
<sup>5</sup>Why should I be afraid in evil days,  
when the wickedness of those at my heels surrounds me,  
<sup>6</sup>the wickedness of those who trust in their own prowess,

and boast of their great riches?  
<sup>7</sup>One can never redeem another,  
 or give to God the ransom for another's life;  
<sup>8</sup>for the ransom of a life is so great  
 that there would never be enough to pay it,  
<sup>9</sup>in order to live forever and ever  
 and never see the grave.  
<sup>10</sup>For we see that the wise die also;  
 like the dull and stupid they perish  
 and leave their wealth to those who come after them.  
<sup>11</sup>Their graves shall be their homes forever,  
 their dwelling places from generation to generation,  
 though they had named lands after themselves.  
<sup>12</sup>Even though honored, they cannot live forever;  
 they are like the beasts that perish.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 49.

**Explorer Challenge:** This psalm is about pairs – of words, phrases, ideas, refrains, kinds of people. Some pairs are similar; some are opposites; and some that appear to be opposites are, according to the psalmist, actually the same. Identify as many of these pairs as you can, and determine if they are similar, opposite, or appear opposite but are really “two of a kind”?

### **DAY THREE: Colossians 3:1-11**

*Life in Christ includes a radical reorientation of our values. Just as the newly baptized shed their old clothes in order to put on new garments, so Christians are called to let go of greed and take hold of a life shaped by God's love in Christ.*

<sup>1</sup>So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, <sup>3</sup>for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). <sup>6</sup>On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup>These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. <sup>8</sup>But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup>In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

**Adventure Challenge:** Colossians 3 - 4. (This is our last week with Colossians.)

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* Research *Scythians*: what might Paul have had in mind in mentioning them?

*Option B:* Compare Colossians 3:10-12 with Galatians 3:23 - 28 and 1Corinthians 12:12 – 13.

*Option C:* Write a paragraph or two about how would you respond to readers who are uncomfortable with some of the statements in Corinthians 3:18 – 4:1?

### **DAY FOUR: Luke 12:13-21**

*In God's reign, the "rich will be sent away empty." Jesus uses a parable to warn against identifying the worth of one's life with the value of one's possessions rather than one's relationship with God.*

<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus,] "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

<sup>14</sup>But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" <sup>15</sup>And he said to them, "Take

care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." <sup>16</sup>Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup>And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup>Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' <sup>20</sup>But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup>So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

**Adventure Challenge:** Luke 12: 1 - 31 (or all of Luke 12)

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* Jesus faults the rich man for not being "rich toward God." Explore what that phrase means, either by skimming through Luke to find examples of being rich toward God, or by using standard research tools to find what others have said about the phrase.

*Option B:* Jesus advises the crowd, "Be on your guard against *all kinds of greed.*" What might Jesus have had in mind by "all kinds of greed"? Research the meaning of *greed*, including its inclusion as one of the seven deadly sins. Are there different kinds?

## **DAY FIVE:**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Benevolent God, you are the source, the guide, and the goal of our lives. Teach us to love what is worth loving, to reject what is offensive to you, and to treasure what is precious in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3)

**Explorer Challenge:** Using commentaries and references, explore how the phrase "poor in spirit" has been interpreted.