

## October 1-7, 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. You may want to recall how the passages were incorporated into the sermon. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions 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

*Jesus' parable about two sons who don't do what they say reveals surprises in the reign of God, such as prostitutes and tax collectors going before others into God's kingdom. In the reading from Ezekiel the people question whether the ways of the Lord are unfair; instead they are to repent and turn to the Lord. Paul urges us to look to Christ as a model of humility, looking to the interests of others above our own. Nourished by the broken bread and shared cup, we offer our lives for the sake of our needy world.*

### DAY ONE: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

*Ezekiel challenges those who think they cannot change because of what their parents were and did, or who think they cannot turn from their wicked ways. God insistently invites people to turn and live.*

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? <sup>3</sup>As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. <sup>4</sup>Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. <sup>25</sup>Yet you say, "The way of the LORD is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? <sup>26</sup>When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. <sup>27</sup>Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. <sup>28</sup>Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. <sup>29</sup>Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the LORD is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? <sup>30</sup>Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. <sup>31</sup>Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup>For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

**Adventure Challenge:** Ezekiel 18.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research to find out to whom was Ezekiel speaking, and why is that historical context important to the message? *Option B.* Compare this passage to Exodus 20:4-6.

### DAY TWO: Psalm 25:1-9

*After declaring praise for the Lord, the psalmist seeks reassurance, instruction and forgiveness.*

<sup>1</sup>To you, O LORD,  
I lift up my soul.  
<sup>2</sup>My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.  
<sup>3</sup>Let none who look to you be put to shame;  
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.  
<sup>4</sup>Show me your ways, O LORD,  
and teach me your paths.  
<sup>5</sup>Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
in you have I trusted all the day long.  
<sup>6</sup>Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,

for they are from everlasting.

<sup>7</sup>Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;  
remember me according to your steadfast love  
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.

<sup>8</sup>You are gracious and upright, O LORD;  
therefore you teach sinners in your way.

<sup>9</sup>You lead the lowly in justice  
and teach the lowly your way.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 25.

**Explorer Challenge:** What changes in tone or attitude do you find in the psalm? For example, compare the opening lines with v. 16-20; or v. 4-5 with v. 6-7. Do you identify with these changing feelings, or can think of a situation when someone might pray in this way?

### DAY THREE: Philippians 2:1-13

*As part of a call for harmony rather than self-seeking, Paul uses a very early Christian hymn that extols the selflessness of Christ in his obedient death on the cross. Christ's selfless perspective is to be the essential perspective we share as the foundation for Christian accord.*

<sup>1</sup>If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

**Adventure Challenge:** Philippians 2.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Scholarship indicates v. 4 might more accurately be translated: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but *also* to the interests of *one another*.” (Changes in *italics*.) Would these changes affect your understanding of this passage? *Option B.* Notice that the verb *work* is repeated three times in v. 12-13; how does this emphasis on work relate to the opening sentences of this passage?

### DAY FOUR: Matthew 21:23-32

*After driving the moneychangers out of the temple (21:12), Jesus begins teaching there. His authority is questioned by the religious leaders, who are supposed to be in charge of the temple.*

<sup>23</sup>When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" <sup>24</sup>Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup>Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'" <sup>26</sup>But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." <sup>27</sup>So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>28</sup>What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' <sup>29</sup>He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup>The father went to the second and said the

same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. <sup>31</sup>Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup>For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

**Adventure Challenge:** Matthew 21.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Compare the description of Jesus in this passage with the picture of him in the reading from Philippians (2:1-13). *Option B.* The chief priests challenge Jesus' authority (his *right*, we might say) to do what he has done; what does the parable and the statement about John indicate that is more important than authority?

## **DAY FIVE:**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

God of love, giver of life, you know our frailties and failings. Give us your grace to overcome them, keep us from those things that harm us, and guide us in the way of salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord; I know them and they follow me. (*John 10:27*)

**Challenge:** Pray or meditate on hearing Jesus' voice and on following.