

Bible Challenge October 15, 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

In Isaiah we are given a vision of the great feast to come, when God will wipe away death forever. In Jesus' parable about a great banquet, those invited do not come, so the invitation is extended to others. In our liturgy God spreads a table before us. Even amid anxiety and hardship we rejoice in the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. With great joy we feast at the table of the Lord, and we go forth to share the wonderful invitation with others hungering and thirsting for the abundant life of God.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 25:1-9

After a hymn of praise acknowledging God as a shelter for the poor, the prophet portrays a wonderful victory banquet at which death—which in ancient Canaan was depicted as a monster swallowing everyone up—will be swallowed up forever. The prophet urges celebration of this victory of salvation.

¹O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. ²For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. ³Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. ⁴For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, ⁵the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled. ⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; ⁸he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 25. (How do verses 10-12 influence the reading?)

Explorer Challenge: *Shroud* and *sheet* (in v. 7) probably do not refer to burial garments but to a) garments worn by mourners; or b) the curtains in the temple that hide from public view the inter parts (where God is present). How does this understanding of the imagery impact the meaning of the passage?

DAY TWO: Psalm 23

As a shepherd, the Lord guides me to do the very things that are good for me and enrich my life.

¹The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.

²The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.

³You restore my soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil;

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Adventure Challenge: Test yourself: how much of this psalm can you recite from memory?

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Use the internet to read at least three different translations of this psalm.

Option B. Use the internet to find different examples of art or music based on this psalm.

DAY THREE: Philippians 4:1-9

Though writing from prison and facing an uncertain future, Paul calls on the Philippians to rejoice and give thanks to God no matter what the circumstance. God's peace is with us and binds together our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, especially when things around us do not seem peaceful.

¹My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. ²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Adventure Challenge: Philippians 4.

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Read Exodus 32:30-34 and Daniel 12 for probable Old Testament sources for “the book of life” mentioned in v. 3. **Option B.** As he concludes this letter, Paul urges the Philippians to do certain things. Make a list of those things; How many are there? Which of them speak most clearly to you?

DAY FOUR: Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus tells a parable indicating that the blessings of God's kingdom are available to all, but the invitation is not to be taken lightly.

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴'For many are called, but few are chosen.'"

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 21:23 – Matthew 22:46.

Explorer Challenge: Option A. What did Jesus mean when he used the phrase *the kingdom of heaven*? Look at Jesus' first use of that phrase: Matthew 3:17. With a concordance or other reference tools find out

how Matthew uses that phrase. *Option B.* According to some scholars, verse 11 probably begins a new parable. Check on-line commentaries or other sources to explore the apparent disconnect between the king's broad invitation (v. 9) and his subsequent decision (v. 13) to reject one not wearing a wedding robe.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord of the feast, you have prepared a table before all peoples and poured out your life with abundance. Call us again to your banquet. Strengthen us by what is honorable, just, and pure, and transform us into a people of righteousness and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation. (*Isa. 25:9*)

Challenge: In these lessons, we are invited to a feast; do you imagine the kingdom is a literal feast of fine food and drink? If not, what kind of feast are we invited to attend? What is being served? When is it being held?