

Bible Challenge October 29 – November 4,

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

On this day we celebrate the message of the Reformation and the heart of our faith: the gospel of Christ—the good news—that makes us free! We pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to unite the church today in its proclamation and witness to the world. In the waters of baptism, we are made one body; we pray for the day that all Christians will also be one at the Lord's table.

DAY ONE: Jeremiah 31:31-34

The renewed covenant will not be breakable, but like the old covenant it will expect the people to live upright lives. To know the Lord means that one will defend the cause of the poor and needy (Jer. 22:16). The renewed covenant is possible only because the Lord will forgive iniquity and not remember sin. Our hope lies in a God who forgets

³¹The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Adventure Challenge: Jeremiah 31:27-40 (or Jeremiah 31)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *the Book of Consolation* (Jeremiah 30 – 31). *Option B.* Research *covenant* (Wikipedia has an interesting article on Biblical covenants.)

DAY TWO: Psalm 46

Even when we are faced with war or natural disaster, the psalmist reminds us, God who creator of everything is with us and is our stronghold.

¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,
and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea;
³though its waters rage and foam,
and though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be shaken;
God shall help it at the break of day.
⁶The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake;
God speaks, and the earth melts away.
⁷The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.
⁸Come now, regard the works of the LORD,
what desolations God has brought upon the earth;
⁹behold the one who makes war to cease in all the world;

who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,
and burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰"Be still, then, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 46 (Option: Compare Psalm 46 with Psalm 47.)

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Psalm 46 describes overwhelming fears of an Iron Age writer; if you were writing this psalm for people today, what fears might you include. **Option B.** In this translation verse 8 calls our attention to *desolations God as brought* with examples in verse 9—but are these examples of desolations? Is that word being used ironically?

DAY THREE: Romans 3:19-28

Paul's words stand at the heart of the preaching of Martin Luther and the other Reformation leaders. No human beings make themselves right with God through works of the law. We are brought into a right relationship with God through the divine activity centered in Christ's death. This act is a gift of grace that liberates us from sin and empowers our faith in Jesus Christ.

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. ²¹But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 3. (To learn the larger context of this passage, read Romans 1:13 – 3:28.)

Explorer Challenge: Option A. According to some scholars, the phrase *through faith in Jesus Christ* in verse 22 is better translated *through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ*. What impact does this revised translation have on your understanding of what Paul is saying? **Option B.** Research some of the rich commentary that has been written on this famous Reformation passage.

DAY FOUR: John 8:31-36

Jesus speaks of truth and freedom as spiritual realities known through his word. He reveals the truth that sets people free from sin.

³¹Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" ³⁴Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

Adventure Challenge: John 8: 31 – 59 (or all of John 8).

Explorer Challenge: Compare the assertion about slaves in verse 33 with the statements in Deuteronomy

6:20-21; 15:12-15; and 24:17-22.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, gracious Lord, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on the church your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (*John 8:31-32*)

Adventure Challenge: Meditate on the covenant God as made with you, written on your heart.

Explorer Challenge: Renew your knowledge of the Reformation (by consulting a standard reference or history).