

Bible Challenge March 5-11, 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. 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 week's gospel tells of Jesus' temptation in the desert. His forty-day fast becomes the basis of our Lenten pilgrimage. In the early church Lent was a time of intense preparation for those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. This catechetical focus on the meaning of faith is at the heart of our Lenten journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. Hungry for God's mercy, we receive the bread of life to nourish us for the days ahead.

DAY ONE: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Human beings were formed with great care, to be in relationship with the creator, creation, and one another. The serpent's promise to the first couple that their eyes would be opened led, ironically, to the discovery only that they were naked.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

^{3:1}Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Adventure Challenge: Genesis 2:15 – 3:7. (If you have time, Genesis 2:4 – 3:24, known as the *J version* of the Eden story.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* If you are not familiar with the term *J (Jahwist) Source*, research it to learn about scholarship on Genesis; alternatively, read an introduction to Genesis.

Option B: Try to describe exactly what happens when Adam and Eve eat the fruit and their eyes were opened; even before she eats the fruit she knows it was "good for food," "a delight," and "desired to make one wise." How are their eyes "opened"?

DAY TWO: Psalm 32

Happy are they who acknowledged their sin, who trust in the LORD.

¹Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!

²Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!

³While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.

⁴For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."

Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.
⁶Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you
in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.
⁷You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.
⁸"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;
I will guide you with my eye.
⁹Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle,
or else they will not stay near you."
¹⁰Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.
¹¹Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 32. (Suggestion: read the verses slowly; try to picture what the words describe.)

Explorer Challenge: This is one of seven *penitential psalms*; research that term and read one of the other seven. Note: studying these seven songs would be a good Lenten discipline.

DAY THREE: Romans 5:12-19

Through Adam's disobedience, humanity came under bondage to sin and death, from which we cannot free ourselves. In Christ's obedient death, God graciously showers on us the free gift of liberation and life.

¹²Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 5.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *original sin*, a doctrine strongly linked to this passage.

Option B. Compare this passage with what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:20-24 and 42-49.

Option C. Sample some of the rich commentary that has been written on this passage. (One place to start is to type *Romans 5* into an on-line search engine.)

DAY FOUR: Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus experiences anew the temptations that Israel faced in the wilderness. As the Son of God, he endures the testing of the evil one.

¹Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and

placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 4.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* This passage uses three words for *the devil*, *the tempter*, and *Satan*.

Matthew also uses *the evil one* in 6:13. Explore the sources and implications of these words or names.

Option B. Read Deuteronomy 8:1-10, which is the probable source for Jesus' quote in verse 4.

Option C. Try to determine what is the issue for any of these three temptations (example: If he is hungry, why shouldn't Jesus turn stones into bread?) When do you face the same or a similar temptation in your life?

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, our strength, the struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and the devil and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (*Matt. 4:4*)

Adventure Challenge: Examine what *empty promises* are most tempting you at this point in your life.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A. Bread alone:* use a concordance to explore some of the many Biblical references to bread and loaves.

Option B: As you enter your Lenten journey, consider specifically how *the struggle between good and evil rages* [both] *within and around us*.