

Bible Challenge March 1 - 6, 2016

INTRODUCTION

Lent is traditionally a time for repentance. In Mark's gospel, Jesus' first sermon is, "Repent and believe the good news that the kingdom of God has come near." The Greek for the word "repent" doesn't so much mean "be sorry or mournful" as "Look up! Think of things in a new way." The readings for the fourth week in Lent encourage us to re-think relationships. Once settled in the new land, the Israelites no longer need God to give them manna; two brothers must reconsider their relationship to their father and each other. Through Christ our relationship to God and to each other is changed.

FIRST READING: Joshua 5:9-12

By celebrating the Passover and eating the produce of the promised land instead of the miraculous manna that had sustained them in the desert, the Israelites symbolically bring their forty years of wilderness wandering to an end at Gilgal.

Adventure Challenge: Joshua 5. (For fun, also read Joshua 6, the famous story of how the Israelites captured Jericho.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read an introduction to Joshua to learn (or remind yourself) of its key ideas and events.

Option B. Skim through Joshua 1 – 6 to get a general sense of Joshua.

Option C. Research "Joshua son of Nun" to learn about this hero, the importance of his name, and his role in Jewish history.

PSALM: Psalm 32.

Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD. (Ps. 32:11)

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 32. (If you have time, also read Psalm 51, another of the *penitential psalms*.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *penitential psalms*, to learn more about this and similar psalms.

Option B. Study how this psalm teaches us about repentance - a new way of looking at things - a theme in this week's readings.

Option C. Compare this psalm with Matthew 5:2-11, "the Beatitudes." Both start with a word that can be translated to "Happy." Are they talking about different kinds of happiness?

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

One way to describe the gospel is the promise that in Christ everything is transformed into newness. All mistakes, all deliberate sins, all old history is reconciled with Christ's resurrection. This is Paul's strong message to the congregation in the city of Corinth.

Adventure Challenge: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 (or 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 6:13).

Explorer Challenge: Research the word *reconcile* or *reconciliation*, key terms in this passage. Note in each use who is the actor and who is acted upon. How does *reconciliation* relate to Paul's declaration of a "new creature"?

GOSPEL: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Jesus tells a parable about a son who ponders his father's love only after he has spurned it. The grace he receives is beyond his hopes. That same grace is a crisis for an older brother who believed it was his obedience that earned his place in the father's home.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 15.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Luke 15 and 16 contain several well-known parables. Identify the common elements in these stories, as well as the important differences.

Option B. Trace the theme of repentance in these stories from Luke 15 and 16, especially rethinking one's relationships to people and things.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of compassion, you welcome the wayward, and you embrace us all with your mercy. By our baptism clothe us with garments of your grace, and feed us at the table of your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

I will arise and go to my father and say, I have sinned against heaven and before you. (*Luke 15:18*)