

Bible Challenge April 23-29, 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

In today's gospel the risen Christ appears to the disciples and offers them the gift of peace. Even amid doubts and questions, we experience the resurrection in our Sunday gathering around word and meal, and in our everyday lives. Throughout the coming Sundays of Easter the first two readings will be from the Acts of the Apostles and the first letter of Peter. Even as the early Christians proclaimed the resurrection, we rejoice in the new birth and living hope we receive in baptism.

DAY ONE: Acts 2:14a, 22-32

After the Holy Spirit came to the apostles on Pentecost, Peter preaches the gospel to the gathered crowd. He tells them that Jesus, who obediently went to his death according to God's plan, was raised from the dead by God. Finally, he appeals to scripture, quoting Psalm 16:8-11, to show that Jesus is the Messiah: though crucified, the risen Jesus is now enthroned.

^{14a}Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed [the crowd]: ²²"You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—²³this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence. ²⁹Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses."

Adventure Challenge: Acts 2.

Explorer Challenge: Peter's speech is designed to convince fellow Jews that Jesus, although crucified, is actually the Messiah. Identify what kinds of evidence or arguments Peter uses.

DAY TWO: Psalm 16

In the Lord's presence there is fullness of joy, and in God's right hand are pleasures forevermore.

¹Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you;
I have said to the LORD,
"You are my Lord, my good above all other."
²All my delight is in the godly that are in the land,
upon those who are noble among the people.
³But those who run after other gods
shall have their troubles multiplied.
⁴I will not pour out drink offerings to such gods,
never take their names upon my lips.
⁵O LORD, you are my portion and my cup;
it is you who uphold my lot.
⁶My boundaries enclose a pleasant land;
indeed, I have a rich inheritance.

⁷I will bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
my heart teaches me night after night.
⁸I have set the LORD always before me;
because God is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
⁹My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices;
my body also shall rest in hope.
¹⁰For you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor let your holy one see the pit.
¹¹You will show me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy,
and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 16. (Option: compare Psalm 16 to Psalm 11.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* This psalm is called “a miktam of David”; research what this means.

Option B: Explore how verses 8 – 10 are used in this week’s reading from Acts (for Day One).

DAY THREE: 1 Peter 1:3-9

This epistle was written to encourage Christians experiencing hardships and suffering because of their faith in Christ. The letter opens by blessing God for the living hope we have through Christ's resurrection even in the midst of difficult circumstances and surroundings.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Peter 1.

Explorer Challenge: Read and introduction to 1 Peter to learn more about the writer, audience, and message of this letter.

DAY FOUR: John 20:19-31

The risen Jesus appears to his disciples, offering them a benediction, a commission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. But one of their number is missing, and his unbelief prompts another visit from the Lord.

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." ²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰Now Jesus

did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Adventure Challenge: John 20.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Research *Thomas the Twin [Didymus]*.

Option B: The meaning of John 20:23 has been a source of debate, particularly among Catholics and protestants. Use the internet to explore some of the commentary on this verse.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty and eternal God, the strength of those who believe and the hope of those who doubt, may we, who have not seen, have faith in you and receive the fullness of Christ's blessing, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. (*John 20:29*)

Adventure Challenge: Reread the resurrection story in John 20), imagining what you would have seen, heard, or felt had you been a character (Mary, Peter, John, an Angel, Jesus, another disciple, or Thomas) at these events?