

Bible Challenge May 7 - 13, 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.

DAY ONE: Acts 2:42-47

Today's reading, a continuation from last week, is a description of life in the community following Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was outpoured on God's people. This new community is founded on the teachings of the apostles and sustained in the breaking of the bread.

⁴²[The baptized] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Adventure Challenge: Acts 2 (the Pentecost story).

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read Acts 4:32-37 and 5:12-16 for two other descriptions in Acts of life in the earliest Christian community.

Option B: Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul's commentary on how some early Christians were celebrating the Lord's Supper inappropriately.

DAY TWO: Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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: *Option A:* If you have not already done so, memorize this Psalm.

Option B: Read this psalm slowly, trying to paint a mental picture for each verse.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read alternative translations of this psalm.

Option B: Research *shepherd* to learn the various meanings this word can include or the traditional responsibilities and lifestyle of shepherds.

DAY THREE: 1 Peter 2:19-25

Doing the right things does not guarantee that one will not experience difficulties, hardships, rejection, or even suffering. Here Christ is presented as the model for our path of endurance and loyalty to God, particularly in the midst of adversity.

¹⁹It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. ²²"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Peter 2.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* This passage seems to be addressed to a specific group of people (See verse 18.); does that information change your understanding or whether you think this advice applies to you?

Option B: Read 1 Peter 3:8-22 for additional commentary on a Christian response to persecution. Are there other Christian responses? How do you respond, or counsel others to respond, to injustice (racism, bullying, etc.)?

DAY FOUR: John 10:1-10

Jesus uses an image familiar to the people of his day to make a point about spiritual leadership. Good shepherds bring people to life through Jesus, but those who avoid Jesus are dangerous to the flock.

[Jesus said:] ¹"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Adventure Challenge: John 10 (notice how the shepherd image is repeated in different ways.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Learn more about Palestinian shepherding; for example, the sheepfold in verse 1 would likely have held sheep belonging to several different shepherds. How does this understanding of multiple flocks in one fold help clarify what Jesus is saying?

Option B: During the first century, some revolutionary leaders claimed to be prophets or a messiah, promising to do "signs"; they were occasionally called *bandits*. How might this information expand our understanding of this passage?

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God our shepherd, you know your sheep by name and lead us to safety through the valleys of death. Guide us by your voice, that we may walk in certainty and security to the joyous feast prepared in your house, 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

Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. (*John 10:14*)

Adventure Challenge: *Option A:* The good shepherd has a long tradition in Christian art; use the internet or other resources to learn more about this tradition. Which depictions appeal most to you?

Option B: The good shepherd has been a favorite subject of sermon writers and commentaries. Use the internet to learn about what has been written and said.

Option C: Sheep and shepherds were familiar figures in Jesus' day, but not for most of us. Consider what image(s) Jesus might use if he were speaking today.