

September 3-9, 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

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the incurable wound of his suffering, yet finds in God's words the delight of his heart. When Peter doesn't grasp Jesus' words about suffering, Jesus tells the disciples they will find their lives in losing them. Such sacrificial love is described by Paul when he urges us to associate with the lowly and not repay evil with evil. In worship we gather as a community that we might offer ourselves for the sake of our suffering world.

DAY ONE: Jeremiah 15:15-21

Jeremiah's delight in the word of the Lord is contradicted by the heaviness of God's hand upon him and God's seeming unfaithfulness. God's tough love to Jeremiah says that if he repents, he will be allowed to continue in his strenuous ministry. Jeremiah is strengthened by the simple words: "I am with you."

¹⁵O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance do not take me away; know that on your account I suffer insult. ¹⁶Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. ¹⁷I did not sit in the company of merry-makers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail. ¹⁹Therefore thus says the LORD: If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them. ²⁰And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the LORD. ²¹I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

Adventure Challenge: Jeremiah 15:10 – 21 (or Jeremiah 15).

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Research Jeremiah to learn why he is so frustrated. **Option B.** Verse 19 indicates that Jeremiah has abandoned his prophetic calling; read Jeremiah chapter 1 to remind yourself of how God called Jeremiah.

DAY TWO: Psalm 26:1-8

The psalmist proclaims a faithful effort to live righteously, hoping to qualify to enter God's house and sing God's praise.

¹Give judgment for me, O LORD, for I have lived with integrity;
I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered.

²Test me, O LORD, and try me;
examine my heart and my mind.

³For your steadfast love is before my eyes;
I have walked faithfully with you.

⁴I have not sat with the worthless,
nor do I consort with the deceitful.

⁵I have hated the company of evildoers;
I will not sit down with the wicked.

⁶I will wash my hands in innocence, O LORD,
that I may go in procession round your altar,

⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.

⁸LORD, I love the house in which you dwell
and the place where your glory abides.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 26.

Explorer Challenge: At first reading, this psalm (including verses 9 – 12) seems uncomfortably pious; one commentator suggests it can really be prayed only by those who have truly suffered for their faith. Read this psalm, imagining yourself the victim of serious injustice.

DAY THREE: Romans 12:9-21

Paul presents benchmarks for faithful relationships with Christians and non-Christians. Love is the unflagging standard of our behavior. When we encounter evil, we do not resort to its tactics but seek to overcome it with good. While Christians cannot control the actions and attitudes of others, we seek to live at peace with all people.

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 12. (This is a repeat of last week.)

Explorer Challenge: Option A - Compare this passage with similar statements in Matthew 5:38-48 and Luke 6:27-36. **Option B** - Consider whether Paul would give this same advice if he were writing September 2017 to people living in Arlington, Virginia, given the current social and political tensions?

DAY FOUR: Matthew 16:21-28

After Peter confesses that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16), Jesus reveals the ultimate purpose of his ministry. These words prove hard to accept, even for a disciple whom Jesus has called a "rock."

²¹From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." ²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 16.

Explorer Challenge: Option A - Research *Son of Man*. **Option B** - In Matthew 16, Jesus calls Peter a rock-- both a building block inspired by the Father and a stumbling block from Satan. Explain, from the information in the text, how he can be both?

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, we thank you for your Son, who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow your commands, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts, so that we may know the hope to which God has called us. (*Eph. 1:17, 18*)

Challenge: *Option A* - How might it be possible to apply the instructions from Paul in Romans to current conflicts—Charlottesville, the immigration crisis, or political deadlock? ***Option B*** - Meditate or pray on the phrase *enlighten the eyes of our hearts*; how might the eyes of our hearts be different from the eyes of our mind or the eyes of our bodies?