

## Bible Challenge September 24-30, 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. You may want to think about how the passages were incorporated into the sermon. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions 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

*Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables, in which Jesus says the reign of God is like workers who get paid the same no matter when they start. When God changes his mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. In baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Luther wrote, in the presence of God's mercy we are all beggars.*

### DAY ONE: Jonah 3:10—4:11

*After Jonah's short sermon in 3:4, the Ninevites all repented and God decided to spare the city. Jonah objected to this and became even more angry when God ordered a worm to destroy a plant that was providing shade. The book ends with a question that challenges any who are not ready to forgive: You, Jonah, are all worked up about a bush, but should not I be concerned about a hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites who do not know the difference between their right and left hands?*

<sup>10</sup>When God saw what [the people of Nineveh] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

<sup>4:1</sup>But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. <sup>3</sup>And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." <sup>4</sup>And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" <sup>5</sup>Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. <sup>6</sup>The Lord GOD appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. <sup>7</sup>But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup>When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." <sup>9</sup>But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." <sup>10</sup>Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup>And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

**Adventure Challenge:** The book of Jonah. (It's a short good read, and not really about a whale.)

**Explorer Challenge:** Who were the *Ninevites* and why is their identity so important to ending of the story? (You may learn this most easily by simply researching the book of Jonah.)

### DAY TWO: Psalm 145:1-8

*The psalmist begins a song of praise for God's wondrous acts that becomes a celebration passing across generations.*

<sup>1</sup>I will exalt you, my God and king,  
and bless your name forever and ever.

<sup>2</sup>Every day will I bless you  
and praise your name forever and ever.

<sup>3</sup>Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised!  
There is no end to your greatness.

<sup>4</sup>One generation shall praise your works to another

and shall declare your power.

<sup>5</sup>I will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty  
and all your marvelous works.

<sup>6</sup>They shall tell of the might of your wondrous acts,  
and I will recount your greatness.

<sup>7</sup>They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness;  
they shall sing joyfully of your righteousness.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 145.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* This is an *acrostic psalm*; find out what that means. *Option B.* In English, *will* and *shall* can indicate either a future event or a declaration of intent (sometimes both); what do they indicate in this psalm? Are they used consistently? How do these compare with the *is* statements?

### DAY THREE: Philippians 1:21-30

*Paul writes to the Philippians from prison. Though he is uncertain about the outcome of his imprisonment, he is committed to the ministry of the gospel and calls on the Philippians to live lives that reflect and enhance the gospel mission.*

<sup>21</sup>For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; <sup>24</sup>but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. <sup>25</sup>Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, <sup>26</sup>so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. <sup>27</sup>Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup>and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. <sup>29</sup>For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—<sup>30</sup>since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

**Adventure Challenge:** Philippians 1.

**Explorer Challenge:** Read an introduction to Philippians, which we will be reading for a few weeks. Who was its audience and what are its themes?

### DAY FOUR: Matthew 20:1-16

*Jesus tells a parable about God's generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.*

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>1</sup>"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; <sup>4</sup>and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. <sup>5</sup>When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup>And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup>They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' <sup>8</sup>When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' <sup>9</sup>When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup>Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup>And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup>saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' <sup>13</sup>But he

replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?  
<sup>14</sup>Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup>Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' <sup>16</sup>So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

**Adventure Challenge:** Matthew 20.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Read Matthew 19:16 – 30 to see how a rich man's question and Peter's inquiry prepare for this parable about the inverted social order in the kingdom. *Option B.* How might you respond to someone who argues, "The landowner in this story isn't being fair, and I believe that God is just: how can this be a story about God's kingdom?"

## **DAY FIVE:**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Almighty and eternal God, you show perpetual loving kindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Open our hearts, O Lord, to give heed to what is said by your Son.

**Challenge:** Review this week's readings and decide which character you most identify with: Jonah? the psalmist? Paul? the Philippians? the landowner? an early worker? a late worker?