

biblestudy: june 2019

Belton Joyner, Jr.

Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

June 2, 2019 Text: Mark 14:17-24, Hebrews 8:6-7, 10-12 “Jesus Institutes a New Covenant”

This is the first Sunday of the month, so in many congregations you would hear again the words of the gospel text. We hear an echo from that Upper Room every time we take Holy Communion.: “my body...my blood.” That’s the blood of the covenant (Mark 14:24).

In Le Nouveau Testament (Synodale Version of the New Testament into French), that word from Jesus about the covenant is translated: “...Ceci est mon sang, le sang de l’alliance...” L’alliance! There are other French words sometimes used to translate “covenant,” but what power there is in “l’alliance!” That is the French word often used for marriage! That is the French word sometimes used for the wedding ring itself. It is as if our Lord has said that His blood is the wedding ring He has given His bride! Look at John 3:29. Look at Revelation 19:7. Look at Ephesians 5:22-33. Dare we say that the blood of Christ is the wedding ring He has given to the Church? L’alliance!

The context for the sharing of the bread and cup (grain and grape) (Mark 14:17) is Jesus’ announcement that one of the twelve would betray Him. What kind of coach would give a pre-game pep talk by saying “At least one of you is going to mess up and destroy all we have worked on together”? Yet, here is our Lord, in the midst of offering all of who He is (body and blood) and He says “One of you will betray me.” Jesus lives (and dies) in the real world. He is not some

kind of idealistic fool who closes his eyes to what is really going on. Even so, He announces and gives the gift of a new covenant, a new alliance.

Does your congregation sing hymns during the distribution of the Communion elements? Many do. This gathering of disciples did just that before they left to go to the Mount of Olives where Jesus was indeed betrayed (Mark 14:26). These songs were probably the Hallel (Psalms 115-118), the psalter usually sung at the end of the Passover meal. How does that 118th psalm end? “Give thanks to the Lord because he is good. Because his faithful love lasts forever.” That’s what our Lord had on his lips as He left to go to His betrayal. That’s an “alliance” we can celebrate! We’re in this together!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Eucharist: Christ’s Feast with the Church* (Abingdon), Laurence Hull Stookey wrote: “Christians come together because the believers by definition are bound together. The congregation, not the individual, is the irreducible unit of Christianity.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Gathered at Your Table, Lord, we open ourselves to Your promise of a new covenant...”

June 9, 2019 Text: Mark 15:6-15, 25-26, 33-39 “Jesus Seals the New Covenant”

There is so much familiar material in this week’s study texts! Pilate. Barabbas. Crucify him! They crucified him. King of the Jews. Why have you forsaken me? He died.

But I want to zero in on a less familiar portion of the story. “The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38). Some students of the Bible suggest that this comment by Mark (and Matthew) is inserted into the account as a strong symbolic statement. It bounces off Exodus 26:31-37. This veil (curtain) was in the temple to separate the holy of holies from ordinary space. What happened behind that curtain was the unimpeded presence of God. Even the high priest could enter that inner sanctum only once a year. (You can read about that in Leviticus 16.)

For some, that holy of holies was a sign and symbol of God’s inaccessibility and God’s distance from daily life. But, we are dealing here with the Word made flesh (John 1:14)! We are dealing here with God in our very midst. So, it is not surprising that with the death of Jesus, our Lord has completed what it means to be human: he died. With His death, the curtain that set God apart from the fullness of the world is torn in two. As Suzanne Watts Henderson has put it: “God is loose in the world.”

Notice that the veil is torn from top to bottom. No human could have

done that. Mere mortals would have to rip the curtain apart by tearing it at the bottom. This is clearly a divine act. Halford Luccock says “...the crucifixion of Jesus, his sacrificial death, removed all that separated (us) from God.” Compare Hebrews 10:19-20: “Brothers and sisters, we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus’ blood, through a new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, which is his body, and we have a great high priest over God’s house.”

The new covenant reaches us in our daily experiences. The dividing wall between sacred and secular is torn down. It all belongs to God. Look at Zechariah 14:20-21. Even the pots in which we cook are now holy! Even the bells around a horse’s neck are holy! The Holy One is in our midst!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In commenting on Matthew’s version of this text, John Wesley (*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*) wrote: “...that Jews and Gentiles were now admitted to equal privileges, and the opening a way through the veil of His flesh for all believers into the most holy place.”

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You live here, Lord...”

June 16, 2019 Text: Hebrews 9:11-22 “The New Covenant’s Sacrifice”

Last Tuesday (June 11) was my wife Toni’s birthday. She would have been 84 years old, but she died in 2011. Our son, B.J., and I were with her when she died. We watched as the Duke Medical Center blood pressure monitor reflected her heart’s struggle to push blood through her weakening system. Finally, at 7:50 AM on September 21, the number plummeted to zero. The nurse glanced at the clock and nodded as we all understood what had just happened. Blood marks the presence of life; when it is no longer available, we die.

It is not surprising that many cultures have used blood as a sign of life and have sacrificed animals so that their shed blood might represent human willingness to offer our lives to the gods. The Hebrews practiced this with an elaborate system of sacrificing goats, bulls, hyssop, birds, etc. It would take blood for a sinful people to be forgiven (Hebrews 9:22).

The writer of Hebrews used that background of Jewish experience to underline how the blood of Jesus has made us clean so we can live for God (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus is the high priest who used His own blood to make the sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-12).

These images seem a little strange to us. [Yet, we do speak of service men and women who give their lives (shed their blood) for our national causes and values.]

All of a sudden, the writer of Hebrews shifts gears and uses another image. In Hebrews 9:15 (CEB) the writer talks about the covenant being like a will. No one gets the inheritance until the death of the one who made the will. It took the death of Jesus for us to get the inheritance of eternal life. The shed blood of Jesus makes us eligible for the bequest of salvation.

The next time you come to the Lord’s Table, enjoy the gift of the blood. It is still our inheritance from the Lord.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In 1876, Robert Lowry wrote a hymn about this theme (hymn 362, *United Methodist Hymnal*): “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Nothing can for sin atone; nothing but the blood

continued on page 2

June 16 *continued from page 1*

of Jesus. This is all my hope and peace; nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my righteousness; nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow that makes me bright as snow; no other fount I know; nothing but the blood of Jesus.

June 23 2019 Text: Colossians 2:1-15 “Hearts United in Love”

This week, let’s make a few side trips through the Colossian text. There are some interesting things to be seen on these “detours.”

Colossians 2:1---Paul says that he struggles not only for those whom he knows, but also for those whom he has not met. Often these days, our congregations are called upon to make sacrifices (often financially) to support and minister to people who live no where near us. The question is not “Do I know them?” Rather, the question is “Where is the need?”

Colossians 2:2---Paul speaks of the mystery of God (NRSV). Other translations put it this way: “secret plan of God” (CEB), “sacred secret of God” (ENT), “open secret of God” (Moffatt), “God’s hidden truth” (TCNT). Then, Paul spells how the mystery is known: “namely, Christ.” There is much we do not understand about God, but in Jesus Christ we have the key to the mystery. Christ opens the door to God’s mysterious love.

Colossians 2:8---It’s easy to get fooled in matters of the faith. When in doubt, some believers take the pulse of the world. (“That must be right because ‘everybody’ thinks that.”) I sometimes tell a church council planning team that if all of its decisions make sense at the nearby convenience mart, then some of its decisions are wrong, because the Church does not decide in the same way as the world.

June 30 2019 Text: Matthew 5:1-12 “Jesus Teaches About Right Attitudes”

If we ever needed evidence that God’s kingdom works with values different from those of the world, all we need to do is read these verses usually called “the Beatitudes.”

“The poor in spirit” (“hopeless” in Common English Bible) are those who know they can’t make it on their own---folks like that belong to the kingdom. (Matthew 5:3) (The world has more appreciation for the self-made man or woman.)

“Those who mourn” (“grieve” in Common English Bible) will find comfort. (Matthew 5:4) (Remember Isaiah 40:1?) (The world lives without hope in the midst of loss.)

“The meek” (“the humble” in Common English Bible) will be blessed by God. (Matthew 5:5) (The world prefers to think that pride and arrogance are qualities that get us what we want.)

“Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” will, in the words of the Common English Bible, “be fed until they are full.” (Matthew 5:6) God will set things right; God’s justice will prevail. (The world prefers personal supremacy over righteousness that honors all people.)

“The merciful” will be shown mercy by the One who is in charge! (Matthew 5:7). (The world tends to think that showing mercy is a sign of weakness.)

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Life-giving Savior, my only claim is upon the gift You have made...”

Decisions are to be based on Christ’s love for all persons.

Colossians 2:12---In the United Methodist service of death and resurrection, the pastor says “As in baptism Name put on Christ, so in Christ may Name be clothed with glory.” Paul speaks of baptism as a burial with Christ with the promise of a resurrection like His. As my pastor recently said, “When we are baptized, we all get the same name: Christ.” When we “put on” Christ, we put on His victory.

Colossians 2:14---The debt created by our sin has been forgiven! The NRSV says it is “erased.” I like the CEB translation: “It is destroyed.” It was destroyed because it was nailed to the cross. Someone once said that Jesus was the greatest sinner who ever lived, because He took all of our sins on Himself. Praise God!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In the Charles P. Frank novel *Digging for Treasure*, a pastor gives this benediction at a funeral: “Go forth now with the peace that comes from the presence of our Lord. Even as we go from this time of sadness, go with the joy of knowing that God makes good on God’s promises. Amen.”

Prayer:

As you prepare the lesson, let your prayer begin: “For so much, I say thanks...”

The pure in heart” are those whose “thoughts, feelings, and decisions” (Joel Green) are true and honest. (Matthew 5:8) (The world thinks that deceit and trickery are the ways to get things done.) God doesn’t get fooled!

“Peacemakers” show that they are in God’s family, children of God. (Matthew 5:9) (The world chooses division, a binary way of relating to others.)

“Those persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (“harassed because they are righteous” in Common English Bible) are winners because the kingdom is made up of folks like that (Matthew 5:10-11). (The world picks on those who seek to live lives of justice and peace.)

The Beatitudes: Kingdom vs. World.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Joseph Girzone (*Joshua*, Touchstone) wrote: “Joshua maintained a simple and happy attitude toward life, looking to distant goals rather than to momentary and immediate satisfactions, realizing ... his Father’s will would ultimately triumph.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Bless me, Lord...”

