

biblestudy: september 2021

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

September 5, 2021 Text: Jeremiah 29:1-23 "Hospitality to Strangers"

After reading this week's focal text, I thought: "Here's evidence that Scripture is divinely inspired, not the mumblings of mortals." What got me to thinking is how the prophet Jeremiah tells those people in exile—torn away from home, torn away from routines—to do the best they can to help the folks who have hauled them off into exile (Jeremiah 29:7). Can you imagine how difficult this must have been for the Israelites? That's divine talk, not human talk!

God had often told them (when they were at home in Jerusalem) to show hospitality to immigrants and foreigners (Exodus 12:19, Numbers 9:14, Deuteronomy 31:12). (Of course, this theme continues in the New Testament: Luke 17:18, Ephesians 2:19, Titus 1:8. And, our Lord himself benefitted from the safety of Egypt when he and Mary and Joseph became immigrants to escape the attack of Herod—Matthew 2:13-15.)

Who are the strangers in your life today? They might be immigrants from some other country. They might be someone from a social/economic class difference from yours. They might be persons of another racial or ethnic identity. They might be a man or woman who has sexual orientation unlike yours. They could even be a family member who has always seemed "a bit odd" or who always seems to vote for the wrong candidate. Strangers. They are all around us.

And sometimes we are the stranger. How do I want to be treated?

September 12, 2021 Text: Luke 7:36-50 "Being Bold to Join"

When I was in the tenth grade, my high school organized a Monogram Club. The members were to be persons who played on one of our school teams: baseball, basketball, or football. I was not on any of these teams, but I was awarded a letter and made a member of the Monogram Club. (Well, actually it was two letters: "SC" for "Siler City High School.") Why did I get this recognition even though I did not play on any of these teams?

Starting in the ninth grade (and for four years), I was the official scorekeeper for the teams. I was at every game, home or away. I tabulated the statistics. I served as sports reporter for the local weekly newspaper. Although I never swung at a single pitch or tried a single free throw or intercepted a single pass, by grace I was considered part of the team.

That is the sort of thing that is happening in this week's focal text. The Pharisees were members of "the team." They knew and practiced the Jewish law. They applied "the rules of the game" in every life situation. Thus, (Luke 7:37) they are really bent out of shape when a woman from the city streets, a woman who was identified as a sinner (one who broke the Jewish law), a woman who was clearly not seen as a member of the faith team, comes in and acknowledges Jesus. The Pharisees don't understand how this "outsider" can gain the attention of Jesus (Luke 7:39).

Yet, Jesus saw that this woman had changed her ways and was now

September 19, 2021 Text: Galatians 2:11-21 "Opening the Door to Christ"

It may be only small comfort, but as the Church lives into these 21st century days of controversy and division we might recall that those early century Christians also struggled with what united them and what separated them. This week's study text depicts one such situation.

In Titus 3:9-11, the apostle Paul has some strong language against those who cause conflict in the Church. It is also the kind of thing he attacks in Romans 16:17-18. That must have been a frequent issue in the early Church because the Galatians text also explores one such example of "us and them," a division that Paul challenged.

Paul says that "the good life" is not measured by details of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:19-20). Here the issues are circumcision and eating practices.

Some found it hard to let go of those traditional practices of the Jewish community. There is often a temptation among the faithful to think "the way we have always done it" is the fullness of what God has revealed!

I hear an echo of Jesus' words: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12, King James Version). When I am the stranger, I want to be treated with respect. Disagreement does not have to mean disrespect.

Jeremiah is writing to a people who are going to be in exile for two generations (Jeremiah 25:11). He is writing from Jerusalem (Jeremiah 29:1) where the country has been ravaged and the leaders hauled off. He would have every reason to insist that the Hebrews who are in exile in Babylon do all they can to hurt their captors. Not so! Jeremiah says it is in everyone's best interest that they work for the well-being of their captors (Jeremiah 29:7). This is no wimpy call to tolerate injustice; it is a plea to show "the other" how life with your values is lived.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In an introduction for *Outside the Lines* (Mihee Kim-Kort, Fortress Press), Rachel Held Evans wrote: "I find it fitting that the word 'hospitable' shares its roots with the word 'hospital,' for the most welcoming people in our lives are ultimately healers."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord Jesus, let me look with Your eyes so I see the stranger in our midst, and then let me love as You would..."

showing great love (Luke 7:47). He granted her a word of forgiveness (Luke 7:48). Although she had not "been part of the team," her faith has saved her. The New Testament word for "saved" is *sōzō*, which also means healed or made whole. In other words, she joined the Monogram Club even though she had not played in a single game.

Our Lord is ready—more ready than we are---to receive and accept folks who do not look like us, who have not had the same spiritual journey we have had, or who come to faith by a grace that we do not see. Thank God for such generous love! Such a love gives a new beginning. Such a love is for real.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Ronald Sider (*The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, Baker Books) says: "In the New Testament the word 'grace' refers to God's amazing act of forgiving us and his equally wonderful act of transforming us.")

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Holy Jesus, I invite You to come into my daily life and I open myself to others who come to be with You. Grant me a vision of grace that I may see others as You do..."

Paul is clear that Jesus Christ is the fullness of what God has revealed.

In case the reader does not get the point, Paul spells it out: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). Jewish men were circumcised; women were not. That division is gone. Who could eat with whom was a way of choosing up sides. That division is gone. Social class has been a way of distinguishing among people. That division is gone.

What are the divisions to which we cling in 2021? How can our oneness in Jesus Christ overcome those separations?

A few years ago I was working with a pre-teen boy on a Scouting recognition. As we walked around the church fellowship center, I would point to things and ask him what they meant. One time I had him look out the window and tell me what he saw. He said, "I see the children's

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playground.” I asked, “And what does that mean?” Parker replied, “It means that all are welcomed at the church.” May it be so.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Wolfhart Pannenberg (*The Church*, Westminster Press) wrote: “...the Christian church...its life together represents for all persons that life in the spirit of love, peace, and justice...the Christian community in its

life together makes visible the lordship of God, which is the future of the world, the future of all (humankind).

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Bind us together, Lord, when we frailly seek to fall apart...”

September 26, 2021 Text: Philippians 3:2-21; Ephesians 2:19-21 “Citizens of God’s Household”

These are rich and wide-ranging verses. The apostle does some reminiscing. He does some looking ahead. And, he looks around at the situation in which he presently found himself. That about covers it!

There are many places here to explore, so I am picking just one: Ephesians 2:19-21. Paul describes the Church family as a household (v. 19). I suspect that Paul knew that everyone in a household does not always get along with everyone else in the household. (Do you suppose he realized that some day folks might fight over who got to hold the TV remote?!) The apostle writes then a bit about what the household does have in common.

One thing everyone living in a house has in common is its foundation. So, what is the foundation for the Church house? Paul names the prophets and the apostles (v. 20). We are not the first. Often we name those in our family history, our ancestry. In my tradition, we look at Martin Luther, John Wesley, Sojourner Truth. What started with “the prophets and the apostles” has continued, as God continued the building. (Sneak ahead a look at verse 21. Paul says it will become a whole building, a temple.) Paying attention to church history is one way we probe the foundation upon which the church household is built.



WORD SEARCH

Find and circle the words in the puzzle. Words may be forward, backward, vertical, or diagonal within the puzzle.

- ASSYRIA CANAAN BABYLON
- PERSIA TOGARMAH TARSHISH
- ROSH ACHAIA MACEDONIA
- PUT ASIA MINOR INDIA
- GALATIA PHILISTIA SAMARIA
- CYPRUS CRETE ETHIOPIA
- MELITA EGYPT JUDAH

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R Q M G A M H Q A S K S T L S
Q M A D C B Q S A P U F U V C
L H C D D N I M O R I O P L R
W T E D P A A F P R H N A S E
J O D O M R K Y D G S B I K T
S Y O I I C C K S A I K A Y E
B A N A I T S I L I H P H K L
B O I I H J G A X E S O C G B
R A A S A A I P G J R J A O X
I V B A R P M Y A N A A N A C
W N H Y O E P R L Y T H H R H
Z M D I L T P R A M E L I T A
S S H I O O X X T G H A D U J
S T Z U A D N O I W O Q C N U
E A S S Y R I A A U E T T G J

Feed My Sheep

In *John 21:17*, Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Jesus fed his sheep when he was here on earth with spiritual and physical food. Most of us have felt the need for help at some time in our lives. In Christ's love, will we be that help and feed His sheep?

Second Harvest Food Bank of Southeast NC
406 Deep Creek Road, PO Box 2009
Fayetteville, NC 28302
Serves Bladen, Cumberland, Duplin, Harnett, Hoke, Robeson, and Sampson Counties
910.485.6923 or <https://hungercantwait.org/>

The Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC
serves Durham, Greenville, New Bern, Raleigh, Sandhills (Southern Pines), Wilmington
(919) 875-0707 or <https://foodbankcenc.org/>

Food Bank of the Albermarle
109 Tidewater Way Elizabeth City, NC 27909
Serves Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Hertford, Hyde, Martin, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell and Washington Counties. 252-335-4035 or <https://afoodbank.org/>

Food insecurity...is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.

Source USDA