

biblestudy: april 2022

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

April 3, 2022 Text: Mark 13:5-8, 28-37 “A Disciple’s Vigilance”

Jesus is clear about this: What we see now is not the end of it. There will be change (Mark 13:8). There will be the unexpected (Mark 13:35). There will be new understandings (Mark 13:36).

Sometimes, we enjoy being in a rut, knowing exactly what to expect; but Jesus gives two illustrations of “rut living” not working. In one case (Mark 13:5-8), He says we cannot jump to a conclusion that the world is ending just because things have gotten tough and rough. In the other case (Mark 13:28-37) he reminds us that just when we think we have things figured out, along comes a surprise.

This ought to encourage us when we encounter a new interpretation of Scripture. God continues to reveal God’s truth and God’s presence, so sometimes God has to find a new way to get us to understand God’s truth. It is not the truth that changes; it is our readiness to grasp it that changes.

When I read these verses in today’s focal text, I recalled something St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2b). In other words, don’t put off receiving God’s saving grace; no one knows God’s schedule (Mark 13:32). As Jesus told the disciples, the owner could come back at any time, so now is the time to be ready (Mark 13:35).

Our Lord alerts us to the fact that there will be those who (Deliberately? Unintentionally?) will fool us into thinking they have the final word (Mark 13:6). (Take a look at the reminders in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10 and 1 John 4:3.) I must seek to be biblically informed and compassionately formed so that I do not fall for the falsehoods that might tempt me into brokenness in my relationship with God and emptiness in my love for neighbor.

Yes, we are waiting for the fullness of God’s Kingdom. Rather than inviting us to relax, that is an invitation to alertness, readiness, and willingness to change.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (Harper One), Marcus J. Borg has written: “Believing in Jesus in the sense of giving one’s heart to Jesus is the movement from secondhand religion to firsthand religion, from having heard about Jesus with the hearing of the ear to being in relationship with the Spirit of Christ. For ultimately, Jesus is not simply a figure of the past, but a figure of the present.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Dear Lord, change me as needed...”

April 10, 2022 Text: Mark 14:27-42 “A Motley Crew of Disciples”

One of my favorite Palm Sunday stories took place at a church that planned to open its worship service with a grand parade of the children of the congregation, each one waving a triumphant palm branch. The congregation would joyfully sing “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” as the youngsters of church celebrated the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. It started off well. The first couple of boys and girls danced down the center aisle. Then, one of the palm branches accidentally was brushed against the neighboring child. He responded by swinging his branch back at the offender, and before long the entire flock of young ones was engaged in sword fights, head banging, and not-so-pious pushing and shoving. Liturgical disaster.

It happens, doesn’t it? The ones upon whom we have counted to “get it right” fall into their lesser selves and fail in faithfulness. I recognize myself in that group. How about you?

It happened to Jesus. He is at a pivotal moment in His journey and longs for the support of those closest to Him. Jesus is in “distress” (Mark 14:33), “agitation” (Mark 14:33), and “grief” (Mark 14:34). All he wanted was for these dear friends and followers simply to be there for Him. And three times when He came in hopes of having their concerned presence, He found them zonked out, soundly asleep (Mark 14:37, 40, 41).

My failure to be faithful may not always be because I do the wrong

thing, but may be because I do nothing at all. Asleep.

Mark 11:1-11 tells of Jesus’ “triumphant entry” into Jerusalem and how the disciples did what needed to be done for the occasion. Mark 14:27-42, on the other hand, depicts “the rest of the story.” These same disciples cannot even stay awake as their Lord moves from triumph to despair.

We don’t always get Palm Sunday right. We don’t always get the end of the week right. But our Lord does two things at that point. (1) He corrects the failing disciples (Mark 14:37, 41). (2) He invites these same disciples to come as His friends as He goes to meet His betrayer (Mark 14:42). They failed Him, but He still loves them! For me, there is Good News in that.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Laurence Stookey (*Calendar*, Abingdon) has written: “The entry into the city... is about us as fully as it is about the people of ancient Jerusalem. Our faith, too, is fickle; we are the crucifiers of the One whose coming we have called ‘blessed.’ (Hence our withered palm branches will produce the dust applied to our foreheads next Ash Wednesday.)”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Hosanna...and forgive us...”

April 17, 2022 Text: Mark 16:1-8 “The Empty Tomb”

Each of the Gospel accounts tells the story of Easter in a slightly different way. Many students of the Bible think that the original manuscript of Mark ended at verse 8 of chapter 16. If that is the case, that version ends with the women who discovered the empty tomb being seized with “terror and amazement.”

It is good to be reminded of that reaction. We have lived so comfortably with Easter that perhaps we find that the discovery of the empty tomb stirs no particular emotion for us. Rather than being shocked and frightened by these things that we do not understand, we simply slide straight into a mode of celebration.

Clearly, the resurrection of Jesus is to be celebrated, but perhaps we would gain even energy for the celebration if we first struggle with the shock of just how amazing this is. But the truth is that once we learn that the tomb is empty and once we have seen the risen Christ, the mood shifts from sorrow to joy, from emptiness to completeness, from terror to triumph.

When I was a little boy, every year on Easter morning I was given some new item of clothing. It might be a shirt; it might be a pair of socks; it might even be new underwear. Easter was about a new beginning, a fresh start. Easter was about things being different. Easter was about replacing my old self with a new self.

A new self. A risen Christ. “Alleluia!” In Charles Wesley’s familiar hymn “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” the joyful “Alleluia” comes at the end of each line. (Most scholars say an anonymous author added that word throughout the original Wesley text.) For those congregations that have not used that praise word “Alleluia” during all of Lent, it is a jubilant recovery of the resurrection victory. “Alleluia” (Hallelujah) means “Praise ye the Lord.”

Even if we have gotten comfortable with the news of the resurrection, perhaps we would do well to have some of the “terror and amazement”

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that filled the hearts of the women at the tomb (Mark 16:8). What does this resurrection mean for my life? What does this resurrection mean for my death? Let’s enjoy meeting the risen Christ!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Peace Child* (Bethany House), Don Richardson tells of an experience he had: “A crisis came. I called upon Him and suddenly He was there,

alive! In fact, two thousand years had not aged Him a bit! I found He still had the same power to transform (our) lives and hold (our) loyalty that He had manifested in the Gospels two millennia before.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Alleluia! You are alive, Risen Lord...”



April 24, 2022 Text: Psalm 104 “A Meditating on God’s Creation”

Creation Care. Climate Change. Global Warming. Environmental Stewardship. For some folks, the choice of which term you use is a political statement. This lengthy psalm does not choose up sides, but is clear that the created order is the work of God.

Among the creatures that get mentioned in this psalm are the clouds, the sea, human beings, light, the wind, dirt, mountains, valleys, wild animals, donkeys, coney (rabbit), birds, grass, cattle, grape drink, bread, cooking oil, trees, goats, storks, moon, sun, lions, whales, dust...No wonder the psalm begins and ends with “Bless the Lord, O my soul!”

Ancient cultures often saw the sea as an enemy, as a place of evil. (How about the flood that destroyed life all around Noah?) In Psalm 104:6-9, the psalmist names all the ways that God has conquered the waters and put such water into the places God chooses. God is so in charge of the ocean that it can be a place of sport (Psalm 104:26). For the psalmist, when God controls the waters, God has put evil in its place.

Did this creation just evolve or did God snap fingers and it was done? The psalmist seems to think that God’s creation moved from one stage to another. The waters flee (verse 7). Grass has to grow (verse 14). Food comes in due season (verse 27). Things are born and things die (verses 29-30). Things happen in a season (verse 19). Trees have to

be planted before they can grow (verse 16). Plants have to mature (verse 14). These images suggest that the psalmist understood that everything in God’s creation did not happen at once.

The bottom line for the psalmist is that creation is God’s gift. Most of the psalm names before God all the things God has done as creator and provider. The closing verse (verse 35) seems to break a bit from the joyous and upbeat nature of this psalm. What bothers the psalmist is that sinners do not acknowledge God as the divine creator, what Richard Clifford calls “the source of the wonderful world.” The psalmist suspects that such people will not take care of the gift God has entrusted to humankind. “Let’s have no more of that disregard for God’s creation,” he says. The final word is “Praise the Lord!”

What Someone Else Has Said:

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. has written of the theology of Charles Wesley’s hymns (*Praising the God of Grace*, Abingdon Press): “In both the Scripture passage and Wesley’s hymns, we remember that we cannot give God glory or power, because they already belong to God. We can, however, acknowledge God’s glory and power in worship and remember that we are living in God’s presence.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, Creator God...”

