

# biblestudy: may 2022

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

## May 1, 2022 Text: Leviticus 25:1-13 “A Sabbath for All Creation”

These verses extend the concept of a Sabbath. Not only do I as an individual honor God in a weekly Sabbath (Exodus 20:10), but I am called to give this same rest to the land (Leviticus 25:4), and even to property (Leviticus 25:13). We are hearing an echo of Genesis 2:2-4: “...and God rested from all the work that God had done.”

The word “Sabbath” means “intermission” or “stop exertion” or “take a break.” Not only does my body need occasionally “to downshift,” but so does the rest of the created order. To get ourselves or plants or crops or relationships in top running order, all need the discipline of a regular Sabbath.

The year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-13) is a reminder that it all belongs to God and not to us. Buying and selling property may seem like a strange way of recalling this truth, but it is to be done in such a way that no one takes advantage of another and in such a way that we no longer divide society into the “haves” and the “have nots.”

Charles Wesley took these strange verses and turned them into an acknowledgment that in Jesus Christ we get back our life. Just as property was returned to its original owner (Leviticus 25:13), so in Christ we are restored to our heritage as children of God. Sin no longer reigns! Brokenness no longer controls us! “Ye slaves of sin and hell, your liberty receive,” Wesley wrote. Just as the ram’s horn (trumpet) sounds

to signal the beginning of new relationships with the land and with one another (Leviticus 25:9), so now we hear the gospel trumpet proclaim our salvation. (This hymn is number 379 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.)

Looking at this study text through Christian lens, we see these gifts manifested in Jesus Christ.

These verses remind us that we do not live in isolation. We are related to the land. We are related to one another. We are related to the divine. We are called to disciplines that keep those relationships strong and fertile. The practice of Sabbath is at the core of those disciplines.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Peace Child* (Bethany House), Don Richardson describes jubilee in Jesus: “...the new life, the love, the joy of knowing Jesus Christ in a personal way. 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 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: “Lord, I hear the trumpet of truth...”

## May 8, 2022 Text: Deuteronomy 14:22-29 “Tithing as Stewardship of God’s Resources”

The tithe, of course, means “ten percent.” These days, we reflect on questions such as “Is that before or after taxes?” and “Does my tithe have to go into the church’s offering plate?” and “What if I have other debts to pay?”

In the time of Deuteronomy, God’s people measured life’s flow by crops and animals (Deuteronomy 14:23). In a festive community gathering, they would share their tithe and all would feast and enjoy life as a gift from God. Sometimes, it was too far to take the tithe offering (for example, to Jerusalem), so faithful ones were to turn the grain/grapes/herds into money, and share that money (Deuteronomy 14:25). Buy whatever that money will purchase and enjoy (“rejoicing together”).

The text takes us beyond our own personal celebration. There are those who have nothing. They are to be given a share of the tithe (Deuteronomy 14:27, 29). Those who have such needs include the “resident alien,” or in today’s terminology, “immigrants.”

May I give a word of personal testimony? On January 30, 1960, I got married. On February 15, 1960, Toni and I recognized that bills came due. It was time to write checks to others. We owed for credit card purchase of gas for the Fiat. We owed rent on our apartment. We had college debts that needed to be paid. You get the picture.

So, we decided together. The first check of our married life was written to Westside Methodist Church in Hopatcong, New Jersey. Last week, ten years after Toni’s death, I pulled out the checkbook for the monthly ritual. Gas. Mortgage. Electricity. Cell phone. You get the picture. The first check I wrote was to Bethany United Methodist Church, in Durham, North Carolina. The only thing that has changed over the years has been the name of the church: Westside, Grace, Pine Valley, Oleander, Highland, Mebane, Trinity, Edenton Street, Duke Chapel, Bethany. I mention this not to pat myself on my spiritual back. I mention it to give testimony to the faithfulness of God in all circumstances. Deuteronomy 14:29 promises a blessing from God in response to the tithe. I testify to the truth of that.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Bishop Robert Schnase (*Five Practices of Faithful Congregations*, Abingdon Press) has written: “Tithing sealed and confirmed their sense of belonging to the church. They made the church’s mission part of their own and prayed for the people, the ministries, and the outreach of the church with renewed passion.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, it is all Yours...”

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May 15, 2022 Text: Job 38:4-11 “The Incomprehensible Magnitude of Creation”

Perhaps I miscounted, but on my first try, I spotted twenty-five question marks in the thirty-eighth chapter of Job. (The number climbs even higher in the next couple of chapters.)

When we look at the breadth of creation, lots of our questions emerge, but these questions in this week’s study text are not questions we ask God, but questions God asks us. These verses are inquiries God makes of Job, but I think we could change the name “Job” to whatever our name might be and the text still makes good sense!

In spite of our efforts to control the forces of nature, as we answer these questions we recognize that God is Creator and we are creatures.

When we abuse the gifts of God’s humongous created order, we reap the brokenness of our sin. Sometimes we recognize the damage we are doing to God’s intent and we make steps to correct our faults. (The church I attend collects plastic to be re-cycled into usable products. Sharon is going to be there every Wednesday afternoon at 2:00 to rescue that plastic from the landfill.)

What do you consider the peak of God’s created beauty? For some it is the crashing waves of the ocean. For some it is the towering peaks of the mountains. For some it is the wide expanse of the desert. For some

May 22, 2022 Text: Joel 2:18-26, Romans 8:19-22 “A New Creation”

This week’s focal text from Joel tells of God coming to the rescue of God’s hurting people. The people’s response is to praise the Lord (Joel 2:26).

This week’s focal text from Romans describes the suffering and decay that is part of our human journey. The faithful’s response is to wait in hope as a woman who suffers labor pains in order to give birth to a child (Romans 8:22).

One way to summarize what these texts say is to proclaim “God ain’t through with us yet.”

What we have seen in Jesus Christ is life when the world intended death. What we have seen in Jesus Christ is forgiveness when the world intended punishment. What we have seen in Jesus Christ is truth when the world intended falseness. What we have seen in Jesus Christ is “Yes” when the world intended “No”.

Do you know where Bahama is? Timberlake? Rougemont? All of these communities are within five miles of my house, but there is a good chance that you have not heard of any of them. Nevertheless, you know some things about me and I know some things about you. Whether you know me or not—and whether I know you or not—here are things we know about each other. We know that life has not been

May 29, 2022 Text: Corinthians 9 “Keeping Up with God’s Generosity”

One of my favorite television programs is Game Show Network’s “America Says.” Contestants are challenged to fill in a blank as people in a survey have filled in the blank. For example, how would you fill in this blank? “\_\_\_\_\_ is the best place in the world to go skiing.” (On the show, you would be provided the first letter of the top seven answers.) One reason I enjoy this show is that I can play along at home. Of course, I am fairly limited in my knowledge of places to ski!

In 2 Corinthians 9, the apostle Paul offers a fill-in-the-blank opportunity. “\_\_\_\_\_ is the way we are supposed to thank God for the gifts God has given us.” Sneak a look at verse 11. Our own giving is the way we thank God for what has been given us.

I can give money. I can give time. I can give relationship. I can give testimony. I can give \_\_\_\_\_. (You fill in the blank!)

There is something interesting about the word translated “generosity” in verse 11. In the New Testament language it is *haplōtēs*. That word, in turn, comes from another Greek word that means “single” or “put together to make one.” In other words, generosity is not measured by the amount I give, but is measured by priority I have for what I give. Is this gift the single most important thing I can do with what I have?

it is the brightness of the sun. For some it is the refreshment of a spring rain. For some it is a small patch of grass. For some it is the sky that peeks behind tall buildings. For some it is the rush of a flowing stream. For some it is the quiet of a peaceful lake. For some it is the solid presence of snow and ice. For some it is the row upon row of seasonal crops. For some it is the closeness of a newborn infant. For some....well, you fill in the blank. No wonder the title of this lesson includes the words “Incomprehensible” and “Magnitude.”

And no wonder that Job hears these questions, reminders of the unfolding breadth and height and width of God’s creation. Thanks be to God!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Come Rain or Come Shine* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons) Jan Karon describes a scene in which folks stop their talking to look at a sun setting behind a mountain: “You could tell a lot about people who would stop what they were doin’ to watch the Almighty go about His business.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Creator God, You continue to amaze and inspire with Your creative work...”

perfect. We know that there are hidden hurts. We know that sin sneaks up on us. In fact, Paul says of you and me: “the whole creation has been groaning” (Romans 8:22).

But the apostle is clear that this condition is not the end of the story. Look at all the positive words as Paul writes: “glory about to be revealed to us” v. 18...”revealing of the children of God” v. 19...”hope” v. 20...”freedom of the glory” v. 21...”first fruits” v. 23...”adoption” v. 23...”redemption” v. 23...”saved” v. 24.

Both the prophet Joel and the apostle Paul have given us a picture of God who does not let go of us. God is aware of the shattered places in our lives and in Christ Jesus has shown us a new creation. Like the early morning dawn may point us toward a day of sunshine, so the resurrected Christ points us toward that new creation.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Douglas Meeks (*Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, Kingswood) has said: “All Christian beliefs pivot on the trust that God will be ‘all in all’ and that God’s ultimate rule will leave nothing to the dominion of death, sin, and evil.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “My hope is built on You, O Lord...”

That’s what Paul is celebrating: the Corinthians have made helping others (the Macedonians, in this case) as their number one—single—priority.

I am left to wonder: What is “number one” in my sharing? If push comes to shove, what gets the “generosity” of the local church’s resources?

Paul says God’s love for us is “indescribable” (v.15). The King James Version says God’s love is “unspeakable.” Lamsa puts it this way: “incomparable gift.” New English Bible renders the phrase “gift beyond words.” And Paul says that the way we give thanks for such a gift is by the way we give.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (Harper and Row), Kennon L. Callahan wrote: “‘Saving money’ does not constitute an adequate stewardship theology. Indeed, the notion that the purpose of stewardship is to help a congregation to conserve its funds is, in fact, counter to the biblical witness.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of unfailing gifts, move my heart and hand to thank You by giving to others...”