



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Easter 7 (A)**  
**May 24, 2020**

**RCL: Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11**

### **Acts 1:6-14**

The first lesson for the seventh Sunday of Easter is the narrative of the Ascension. Jesus has been resurrected and the disciples know that life will never be the same again! But they still can't wrap their minds around what that really means. In our reading, they ask Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Throughout the Gospels, the disciples consistently expect Jesus to operate as a human king would - throw off the oppressive Roman Empire, seize power, and use force to bring about God's Kingdom. We see this question again as the disciples want to know when their world will radically change because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

As our world is turned upside down by COVID-19, perhaps we are also wondering when God is going to restore our world. The suffering, anxiety, fear, and grief in our world right now is immense. Lord, is this the time?

Instead of throwing off the Roman Empire, Jesus leaves the disciples, promising them the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. After a quick pep-talk from two angels who find the disciples staring into the clouds after Jesus ascends, the disciples return to Jerusalem. They spend time quarantined together, praying and waiting for God. They do not know what is coming, but they are open to God's movement in their lives.

Perhaps in the midst of praying and waiting, the disciples also felt alone after losing Jesus in the flesh again. Maybe we also feel alone, yearning to be able to see and touch Jesus, especially during this global pandemic. Soon after the Ascension, we celebrate Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and the birth of the Church. We might not be able to physically attend church right now, but the Spirit has not left us. We are never alone, and the Spirit is at work in our world and in our lives, moving forward the work of healing and restoration of God's Kingdom.

- In this time of social distancing, how can we develop communities of prayer and commitment to the movement of God's Spirit in our lives?

### **Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36**

In Psalm 68, God is portrayed as the divine king, full of power and vengeance. Verse 2 discusses the wicked perishing at the presence of the Lord. Who are the enemies of God? It appears those who oppress the vulnerable and marginalized are on the receiving end of God's anger. God is the champion and

protector of orphans, widows, prisoners, the poor and all who are oppressed. God sees and cares deeply for those who are suffering in our world and we are called to do the same.

- The image of God providing a home for the suffering appears twice in this selection of Psalm 68. Have you experienced God as provider of a home – physical, spiritual, or otherwise – during a time of suffering?

### **1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11**

1 Peter was most likely written by a disciple of Peter, not Peter himself. The book is written to marginalized people trying to live in a hostile, dominant culture. The focus of 1 Peter is to provide encouragement and support to people who are suffering. Verse 7 calls us to “Cast all [our] anxiety on him, because he cares for [us].” Each of us is seen by God and is invited to hand over our anxiety to the divine One who cares deeply for us. How do we cast our anxiety onto God without feeling guilty when we still feel anxious after supposedly giving it to God? This is a practice, not a one-time thing. We continually share the realities of our hearts with God, the creator of the world who loves and delights in us. It is an invitation to draw closer to God, to share freely our experiences in a world full of joy and suffering, rather than a test of our faithfulness.

- What practices help you to feel closer to God during anxious times?

### **John 17:1-11**

Leading up to our reading in John, Jesus is preparing the disciples for his rapidly approaching death. In John 16:28, he tells the disciples, “I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.” The disciples respond that they finally understand, but with our benefit of knowing the story, we know that they still don’t really know what is coming. We need to read our gospel text with the tension and anticipation of where it fits into the story of Holy Week. In the Gospel of John, these are the last words in a prayer to God the Father that the disciples will hear from Jesus before heading out to the garden to be betrayed by Judas to the soldiers.

In this intensely personal and emotional prayer, Jesus prays for the disciples and he prays for us. Through the centuries, Jesus prayed for all of God’s people before his death and resurrection. We can hear Jesus’ angst and love for all of us in this prayer.

In this prayer, Jesus says “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). What if we meditated on this today? We can get bogged down in all of the unknowns around eternal life and heaven. But ultimately, eternal life is being in relationship with God and Jesus Christ. The Ascension story from Acts explains how we no longer have Jesus incarnate amongst us. We cannot experience Jesus’ physical presence in the way the disciples did, and it can feel difficult to be in relationship with someone we cannot see, touch, or hear directly. Next week is Pentecost and the Holy Spirit will be poured out onto our world. We are not alone. The Spirit is among us. Jesus prayed for us as he approached betrayal and execution at the hand of the Empire. We are known and loved by God.

- As Easter ends, how have you experienced or not experienced eternal life during this season?

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