



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 1 (A) January 12, 2020

RCL: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

Isaiah 42:1-9

In this passage, we read one of the four servant songs of Isaiah. Israel is portrayed as the servant, whom God loves, and through whom God will bless all the nations. God is described as the powerful creator of the heaven and the earth, who is worthy of glory and praise. Yet this God is close enough to take the people by the hand and to hold them. How beautiful are the words from the opening line, “my chosen, in whom my soul delights.” These are words of belonging that many long to hear, whether from parents, spouses/partners, children, or friends. My soul delights in you, says God, and nothing will get in the way of that love. In addition to covenantal language, this passage is also a commissioning for the work set out for Israel. We are told that Israel will not cry out in the streets, grow faint, or be crushed as they do the work of bringing justice to all the world. Bring sight to the blind God says, bring prisoners out from the dungeons. Through your work, I will make you a light to the nations. God does not take justice lightly, but as we hear in this passage, it is in fact work God has called us to. It might resonate with our post-communion prayer, “send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord...”

- What images or feelings come to mind when you think about God’s soul delighting in you?
- Can you think of a time that God blessed you through others or when others were blessed through you? Where was God in those moments?
- When you think of bringing justice to the world what work comes to mind?
- What part of justice-making might God be calling you to you?

Psalm 29

Psalm 29 contains vivid imagery of what God’s voice looks and sounds like: thunder, mighty waters, flames, writhing oak trees. These images speak of a God who cannot be contained nor controlled. This is a voice of power and might, and we are told to “Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his name.” Yet in the last verse we hear a switch from a description of God’s being to God’s plans. What does God intend to do with all God’s strength? To give it to the people, that they may be strengthened and find peace. This psalm may bring to mind the story of Elijah, when God came to him not in the wind or fire, but as a still small voice. It may even bring to mind the story of the Good Shepherd when we hear of God calling each sheep

by name. God's voice is indeed one of unimaginable power, but through God's love it is a voice that we can hear and respond to as well.

- What does God's voice sound like to you?
- Where do you hear God's voice?

Acts 10:34-43

This passage is a snippet from Peter's visit to Cornelius and his household in Caesarea. We hear Peter give an account of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Most importantly Peter speaks of God's lack of partiality and that the good news of Christ is available to all who believe. It can be difficult at times to accept that it is God who calls disciples, and not we ourselves. It is important to remember that we must work alongside all the members of the body of Christ, even those we disagree with in order to do God's work. Peter also speaks of those who ate and drank with Jesus after his resurrection and then of the apostles commissioning to preach. Even through death, Jesus was still with his disciples, just as he is still with us as we gather to pray and eat together.

- Where have you encountered the risen Christ?
- Where might God be calling you to share your story of encountering Jesus?
- Are there moments you wish God showed partiality? How can you come closer to those within your faith that you disagree with?

Matthew 3:13-17

This passage follows John's preaching of Isaiah, "prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." When Jesus gets to the river Jordan John, recognizing who Jesus is, states that it should be Jesus who baptizes him, not the other way around. This is just the beginning of Jesus' work and ministry and already he is turning everything upside down and inside out. We will be doing things differently Jesus seems to say. It is through this new way of thinking that the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove and we hear the words of heaven, "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus' baptism marks his time to begin his work in the world around him, just as our own baptism call us into the life, death, and resurrection of our own lives. It is time to remember Jesus' baptism and our own. You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, you are a beloved one of God. Just as Jesus turned the world upside down, how might you through your baptism join in the work of God?

- Where were you baptized? Who was there? Do you remember it?
- Read through the baptismal covenant in the Book of Common Prayer. What parts stand out to you and why?
- Have you felt the Holy Spirit as closely as the dove was seen at Jesus' baptism? What does God's voice sound like when God calls you beloved?

This Bible study, written by Reagan Gonzalez, originally ran for Epiphany 1 on January 8, 2017.