



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 6 (A)
February 16, 2020

RCL: Deuteronomy 30:15-20 or Sirach 15:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

In the Old Covenant, the people of Israel had a choice: life or death. Not quite live or die - or even live and let live. Rather, it was an invitation to live a discerning life. It was the summons to righteousness - or friendship with God - and life-giving choices. The choice was up to them.

“I call heaven and earth as witness today against you,” Moses set the choice before Israel. They had to choose between life and death, blessing and cursing. And he pled: choose life.

Choosing life meant to love God and others and to walk in God’s ways. Choosing life was a means of growing in faith, hope, and life. Life is the choice to grow in intimacy with God and others and to shun all that distracts us from that divine friendship. Moses pled for Israel to choose faith, hope, love, and intimacy with God. The choice belonged to Israel. And he told them how God’s heart longed for their friendship, as it had longed for a holy friendship with their ancestors, Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah.

- How are you choosing life? What choices are you making in daily life to make time for prayer, to care for those in need, and to walk in God’s ways?
- What is distracting you from prayer? What is taking you away from your loved ones? Where are you sending your energy, time, and money?

Psalm 119:1-8

Some biblical scholars suggest that this psalm was written by King David throughout his life. They assert that the psalm was written, re-written, and edited many times. As he meditated on blessedness, King David came to see that true happiness is to walk in God’s ways. David was far from perfect. He was a man who struggled and sinned greatly. But he also loved deeply. And every time he found himself humbled by his ego, pride, and flaws, David found himself on his knees, meditating on God’s word.

In Psalm 119, we learn that true blessedness requires us to read scripture and to meditate on God’s words. Happiness comes from ruminating on God’s word and paying attention to how God speaks to us as we break open his word. When the world tells us that happiness comes from new gadgets or a complete makeover, we are reminded that happy are they who walk in the law of the Lord and observe his decrees. Blessedness comes from seeking God with all our hearts. Joy is the result of quieting our hearts, meditating on God’s word, and following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

- When you are praying with scripture what helps you to listen to God’s promptings through that passage? What makes it difficult to meditate and ruminate on God’s word?
- What does it mean for you to be blessed or happy? What brings you joy, peace, and freedom?

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

The Apostle Paul tells the people of Corinth that he does not speak to them as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh. Not as people who were ready for a deeper life in the Spirit, but as people who still needed to be fed with milk – to be given the basics. Paul asserted that their lack of commitment to life in the Spirit was a result of their inclinations. There is a difference between being fleshy (the Greek word *sarkinos*, which Paul used in 2 Corinthians 3:3) and being fleshly (the Greek word *sarkikos*, used here in this passage). Being fleshy means being “made of flesh,” or to be a creature. Being fleshly means being “characterized by the flesh.”

For Paul, the people of Corinth were characterized by the flesh. They gave in to all sorts of desolations and inclinations that distracted them from true love of God and one another. They gave in to self-gratification. Not unlike the Corinthians, we attempt to cope with physical and emotional pain by turning to substances, unhealthy relationships, denial, food, sex, or the need to control or fix things. But when we run from pain, we cause more pain. Paul wanted to teach people to live in the Spirit. He wanted the Corinthians - and he invites us - to stop running from pain and to start embracing the healing that comes from friendship with God.

Matthew 5:21-37

This passage belongs to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus tells the crowd that it is not enough to abstain from murder: “I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment... you will be liable to the hell of fire.” According to Barclay, in Greek, there are two words for anger: *thumos*, which burns quickly like dried straw, and *orge*, which is a long-lived anger. Jesus understood the human heart, and he knows that anger is a normal reaction. Sometimes, anger is justified because it is the result of injustice. Often, anger is the result of a wounded ego. Jesus condemns selfish anger. He forbids the type of anger that broods - our claim to revenge and self-righteousness. Jesus wants us to banish all selfish anger from our lives. It is not a summons to suppress or repress anger, but to let go. Jesus asks us not to let our anger linger too long.

- When anger builds, do you fall into it or are you able to let it go? What helps you to let go?
- How does prayer, meditation, or celebration of the sacraments help you bring your anger to God and let God transform it?

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