



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Lent 1 (C)
March 10, 2019

[RCL] Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

One might be forgiven for thinking, after reading this lesson, that the season of stewardship drives had begun rather than Lent—what is all this about offerings? Are we being called to repent for our lackluster tithing this past year? Perhaps, but let us rather turn our attention to the confession of faith that the redeemed of Israel are to make upon entering into their inheritance in the Promised Land.

Here we see a profound statement of faith, reminding Israel first that it wasn't because of any special excellence on their part that God chose their ancestors and treated them with such favor, but only God's goodness and loving initiative. Second, that it wasn't by their own might that they were delivered from their former collective oppression, but because the Lord heard their cry and acted on their behalf. Third, that it wasn't by their own working that they have received such a bountiful and rich inheritance in the land, but rather God prepared it for them and gave the growth. As Christians, we recognize that all of this was anticipating our still greater deliverance and Exodus from sin, death, and spiritual oppression, and our still greater inheritance that is won for us by means of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- What things has Jesus Christ delivered you from that you are most grateful for?
- There is a popular offertory sentence that goes: "All things come of Thee, O Lord," To which the people respond, "And of thine own have we given Thee." What gifts or resources has God blessed you with that have inspired you to generosity?
- Verse 11 commands us to celebrate God's mighty deeds on our behalf with the clergy and with the aliens who reside among us. How might we encourage our clergy or share our faith and our generosity with those who are outside the family of the Church?

Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16

Psalm 91 is a proclamation of God's extraordinary care and protection for those who trust in Him, and it has been a source of comfort and confidence for God's people from generation to generation. But given the suffering we so often experience in our lives, how can we possibly have faith in God's protection? In verse 14, we hear God say: "Because he is bound to me in love, therefore will I deliver him; I will protect

him, because he knows my Name.” In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul reveals the nature of this unbreakable bond of love when he says, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” This is a bond that has sewn us inseparably into the very heart of God because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The letter to the Ephesians states: “No one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body.” When we are tempted to believe we might just slip through God’s fingers, let us remember that we *are* one of his fingers! It’s simply impossible for God to let go of us!

- Can you describe a time when you experienced God’s protection when you were in danger?
- Do you find it difficult or easy to believe that God extends protection over you in your daily life?

Romans 10:8b-13

Here we encounter the beating heart of the Christian faith, its indispensable core, which has taken the place of Israel’s statement of faith that we encountered in our first reading: God has raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord. This is significant for us today because, as St. Paul wrote four chapters before: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Scripture teaches us that by virtue of our mystical union with Jesus, a part of ourselves has already been raised with Jesus into heaven! Thus, by grace, we are able to put away our old nature which is in bondage to deceitful desires and put on a new nature, which is even now being strengthened by God to love him with our whole heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we submit our lives, habits, and relationships in faith to Jesus the Lord, that faith will not be put to shame. In the words of St. John: “This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith” (1 John 5:4).

- Can you remember the time you first came to believe that Jesus is Lord and God, and that “He is risen indeed”? Or have you believed for as long as you can remember? Or do you still struggle with these claims?
- Why do you suppose these claims were so explosive and controversial in the Roman Empire? Are they still as explosive today or have we become desensitized to them?
- Describe what the claims “Jesus is Lord” and “He is risen from the dead” mean to you personally.

Luke 4:1-13

This scriptural account shows us how Jesus is not foreign to any of the temptations that are common to our humanity: his human nature is in every way like ours, yet without sin. At first glance, we see Jesus being tempted with the desire for security, power, and affection. All human beings encounter these temptations from time to time, but what is really being challenged here is Jesus’ identity as the Christ and his unique mission as Savior. “If you are the Son of God...” says the Tempter, “If you really care about these humans and want them to be happy, you can whip up all their bodily necessities, rule over them justly and be feared and respected by everybody— nobody can do the job better than you. Just submit to me and my methods.” But Jesus holds steady to his purpose: he must conquer with suffering love, not coercion.

This is likewise what is being challenged within all our little temptations: our *identity* as sons and daughters of God in Christ given at Baptism. When we sin, we are acting in a way that is foreign to the new life that God has given to us—we have forgotten ourselves. We must turn to the Scriptures as Jesus does to remind ourselves frequently of who we are in him, and we must turn to our Savior who “knows the weaknesses of each of us,” that each one of us might find him mighty to save.

- All human beings need some degree of basic security (bodily, emotional, spiritual), a sense of control or ability to impact their environment, and a degree of dignity, respect, and esteem from other people. These are, of themselves, good things. At what point do these good things become *temptations*? How can you tell in your own experience that something is a temptation?
- In which of these ways do you find yourself most frequently tempted? Seeking security, control, or approval? How might you counter these temptations using scripture or prayer?