



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Lent 5, Year B**  
**March 18, 2018**

**[RCL] Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-13; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33**

### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

The prophet Jeremiah was active in the final years of the kingdom of Judah, leading up to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC and the Jewish people's exile in Babylon. In the face of this impending destruction, he nevertheless foresaw a restored life for the people, one in which they would be even closer to God than before. God promised to maintain a covenantal relationship with the people, just as he had after the Exodus—but instead of a law written on stone tablets, God would write the law of the new covenant on their hearts. Later Christian interpreters would see themselves as the recipients of this “new covenant” or, in one Latin translation, *Novum Testamentum*, from which we get the term “New Testament.”

- Have you ever felt comforted by a promise during a difficult time?
- What would it look like for God to write his law on your heart? Has your Lenten practice helped you move toward this vision?

### **Psalm 51:1-13**

The Church has long recognized Psalm 51 as a central psalm of penitence and contrition; it is a major part of the Ash Wednesday liturgy, where its penitential tone sets the stage for Lent. The editors of the Psalms described it as “A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba,” linking its general themes of sin and repentance to a specific instance of sin. The words of the psalm, when lifted out of the context of this story, can apply to almost any human life. The psalm's great power comes from the potential each person has to find herself or himself in it.

- We frequently confess our sins against God and our neighbor, but the psalm claims that, “Against you only have I sinned” (v. 4). In what sense are sins against neighbors sins against God?
- The psalm builds toward a prayer for a “clean heart” and a “right spirit,” for the joy and sustenance of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever felt refreshed or renewed by confessing where you've gone wrong?

## Hebrews 5:5-10

The curious figure of Melchizedek appears twice in the Old Testament. Melchizedek, whose name means “King of Righteousness,” is called the “King of Salem” (that is, Jerusalem) and a “priest of God Most High” in Genesis 14, where he offers bread and wine and blesses Abram. Psalm 110 addresses the king in a royal psalm, saying, as Hebrews quotes here, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

In ancient Judaism, priests regularly offered sacrifices of many kinds in the Temple, which was the main form of worship. The high priest played the key role of cleansing the Temple of impurity on the annual Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. In this passage, Hebrews combines these and other images from Scripture to describe Jesus: Son of God, righteous king, high priest, suffering servant, obedient follower.

- What are some of the images that help you understand Jesus? Righteous King? Royal priest? Shepherd? Brother? How do these different names change the way you see him?

## John 12:20-33

This “passion prediction” is one of the instances in the gospels in which Jesus says something suggesting the way he will die, and what effect his death will have. This passage is only about halfway through the gospel, continuing a series of sayings beginning in the earliest chapters of John, in which Jesus proclaims the saving power of his coming death. After hearing that “some Greeks” have come to see him, Jesus promises that he will “draw all people” to himself. “Greeks” here likely means “people who are not Jews,” as it does elsewhere in the New Testament, rather than people from what we would now call Greece. The idea that Greeks are coming to Jesus is therefore a physical embodiment of his relationship with “all people.”

- How has Jesus drawn you to himself? Has his death on the cross been an important part of that attraction? Why or why not?
- What does it mean in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that Jesus will draw “all people” to himself? Do you have a part to play in that process?

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