



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 9, Proper 11 – Year B
July 22, 2018

[RCL]: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

We Episcopalians are fond of building beautiful churches as our places of worship and spend considerable amounts of money maintaining them. Often we are criticized by both outsiders and fellow Episcopalians who are not in favor of spending funds on what some would consider extravagances. There is an argument to be made that this money would be better spent on charitable works for the poor which some believe would be more pleasing to God. However, the prophet Nathan confirms King David's reflection that it is only right that God also have a permanent house of beauty, worthy of his greatness and faithfulness to his people.

While we should avoid using a disproportionate amount of our financial resources on our church buildings to the detriment of our charitable works (James 2:14-26 mentions that faith without works is dead), let us not consider our places of worship as unnecessary financial burdens or that God himself would disapprove of such places. Instead, let us confidently recall the prophet Nathan's affirmation to faithful King David: "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

- How do you feel about financial resources being spent on church buildings?
- Do you feel your church community is appropriately allocating its funds between its church buildings and its charitable works?
- How would you respond to a critic of spending large amounts of money on our places of worship?

Psalm 89:20-37

Sometimes when bad news stories—abuse scandals, bitter schisms, and decline—confront the church, we can become disheartened and start to question our loyalty to the institution and our faith. However, we are assured by this psalm that God himself will hold accountable those who stray from what is pleasing to him. We are also encouraged to remain faithful and not to lose heart because King David's family lineage, including Jesus Christ himself and all Christians by faith, are assured of God's enduring love and faithfulness until the end of time. Let us, therefore, carry on with confidence in the knowledge that God is always with his faithful people, and offer this encouragement to our fellow Christians.

- How do you feel about bad news stories confronting the church?
- Does this psalm encourage you?
- How can you encourage your fellow Christians in their faith and commitment to the church?

Ephesians 2:11-22

During this era of hostility and even schism within our Anglican Communion, St. Paul's message of unity to the divided Christians in Ephesus is a great source of reflection and encouragement to our own generation. He reminds us that even though we may be different from each other, we are all united by faith in Jesus Christ who destroys the divisions between us and brings peace. Although there are great diversities of belief and practice among us, whether we like it or not, there is only one Body of Christ of which we are all part. We must therefore never lose sight of our unity in Christ—that in him, we are brothers and sisters with none more superior nor inferior to the other. We must not allow this vision of peace and reconciliation with God and with one another to be overshadowed by the things that divide us. Let us truly become the dwelling places for God that we are intended to be.

- How do you feel about diversity in the church?
- What can we do in our daily lives to express our unity in Christ?
- What can we do to encourage peace and reconciliation within our local church communities and within the wider Anglican Communion?

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

In this scene of overwhelming need from the people, Jesus clearly shows his humanity by understanding that his disciples have been so dedicated to their ministries that they have become exhausted and need some time for themselves. Although they may not want to leave as they know there is still much to do, Jesus is encouraging them to acknowledge their human limitations. He surely knows that if his disciples reach the point of burnout, they will no longer be able to continue their ministries and be of use to anyone. They must take a rest.

Although Jesus must also have been tired, recognizing the great spiritual hunger among the people and the need for guidance that is still unfulfilled, he pushes on and shares with them many things that bring healing and wholeness to their lives. Just as in Jesus' time, there remains a hunger in society for the timeless values and spirituality that Jesus brought with him through his life and ministry. As Episcopalians within the Anglican Communion, this should remind us of the 2nd Mark of Mission: "To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers." As followers of Jesus, we are called to continue his mission in our own time and place, bringing the same healing and wholeness that he brought to the people of his own generation.

- How can we encourage a culture within our church that values the need for rest to promote greater productivity in our ministries?
- How has the life and ministry of Jesus brought healing and wholeness to your own life and the lives of those around you?
- How can we better prepare ourselves to fulfill the 2nd Mark of Mission?

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