



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 8
Proper 12 (A)
July 26, 2020

RCL: Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b or Psalm 128; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Genesis 29:15-28

In the story of Jacob and Laban, the trickster is tricked. Jacob, who stole his brother's birthright, is tricked into marriage with Leah, the first daughter, displacing Rachel, the second daughter. Through this manipulation, Jacob and Laban treat Leah and Rachel as objects to be earned and bargained for. In turn, the women use their slaves as commodities to be used for sexual services in order to continue Jacob's line. Jacob's deceitfulness leads to a long story of continuing deceit and abuse of power. His trickery and manipulation of power set up the origin story of the dissension among the twelve tribes.

Manipulation and abuse of power incite additional manipulation and abuse of power. It is often difficult to see where the ripples of abuse land, and how our sins feed a continuation of greed, abuse of power, and trickery. This spring we have seen again the result of the manipulation and abuse of power which began with slavery and continues in racial injustice today.

- Have you ever been the victim of trickery leading to personal loss? How did you respond?
- Jacob, the trickster, is an important patriarch. What does that tell you about human nature?
- Later in the story, Jacob wrestles with God. How do you wrestle with God when you hear this story?

Psalm 105:1-11, 45b

This morning I stood outside on my porch with a cup of coffee and my whole heart sang out praise to God for the beauty of our world. It was a respite from everyday life, which is filled with fear. Fear of the pandemic. Fear of our neighbor as protests become violent and racial injustice continues unabated.

This psalm of praise reminds me that God created a world worthy of thanksgiving. Humanity creates fear and fear divides us. Songs of praise give us an opportunity to come together, united in love rather than divided by fear and hate.

- The isolation of restrictions to prevent the spread of coronavirus has eroded our sense of community. How can we rebuild community in ways which respect the dangers of COVID-19, while bringing us together as the unified body of Christ?
- In what ways do songs of praise call us to love one another and work towards racial reconciliation?
- The covenant which God made with Abraham was for "a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:4). How can you embody the plurality of God's promise in today's world?

Romans 8:26-39

Paul wrote the letter to the Romans at the pinnacle of his ministry. In the letter, he articulates his mature understanding of God and his mature understanding of his reliance on the Holy Spirit. This reading resonates with me as the humanity of Paul – especially his recognition that he is not always able to pray. In it, I hear Paul convincing himself that in the face of the many difficulties experienced by him and the early Christians, nothing can draw him or us away from Jesus. I find comfort in Paul’s words when I face situations that leave me with no words for God. Only silence.

When I learned about the murder of George Floyd at the hands of men whose job it is to protect us all, I had no words. I had only sighs too deep for words. All I could do is put my full faith in Jesus being with us all. Even in moments like this.

- Paul finds the Spirit in “sighs too deep for words.” Where do you find the Spirit in moments of sorrow, doubt, and fear?
- Try to sit with silence for five minutes. Do you feel the presence of God?
- Think of a time when you were truly sorrowful. How did you experience God in that moment?

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

“The kingdom of heaven is like...” what is the kingdom of heaven like? We need Jesus to tell us because we are mired in the kingdoms of the earth and find it hard to imagine what God truly wants for all of us. Our tiny seed of faith maturing into a place to provide shelter for all. Faith and love mixed like yeast into a community where all can feel the abundance of God’s grace. The treasures of God’s love for which we would give up every material thing. A net which gathers up all that we are and sorts out the pain, anger, and fear so that only love and grace remain. The kingdom of heaven... in times such as these, we need to cling to the parables about the kingdom of heaven so that we remember who we are and who made us.

- Who yearns to be sheltered in your community of faith? How can you create a space for all?
- How can the abundance of God’s love be spread throughout your whole community? What concrete ways can you reach out to your neighbors and help them to know God’s love and grace?
- What material things hold you back from embracing the full love and grace of God’s kingdom? How can you learn to give those things up?
- What do you need to separate out of your own net? Anger, fear, unjust privilege? What does it look like to live through grace and love?

Jennifer Allen is a seminarian from the Diocese of Kansas at General Theological Seminary, in her senior year. She completed CPE last summer in Kenya, working at the Agatha Amani House. Her work with survivors of domestic violence has led to an interest in trauma theology and how the church responds to trauma in its liturgies, preaching, and pastoral care. When Jennifer returns to Kansas, she hopes to continue work in innovative ministries, reaching out to those who have experienced trauma and developing a worship experience which will incorporate creation care and outreach to the homeless and trafficked. Jennifer’s husband, David, is patiently waiting for her at home in Kansas with their Newfoundland, Molly. Their son, Matthew, is married to Rylie and works with David. Their daughter, Olivia, teaches first grade in Fort Worth, Texas. The whole family enjoys camping and hiking.