



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Pentecost 7, Proper 9 – Year B**  
**July 8, 2018**

**[RCL]: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Psalm 48; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13**

### **2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10**

The breadth of David's story throughout scripture is here condensed and blessed in the tenth verse of 2 Samuel 5: "And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him." This emphatic illumination of God's presence repeats a refrain that has been persistent throughout David's rise to power: God is with him (1 Samuel 16:18, 17:37, 18:14), and it is here that this rather climactic anointing of David as king of a united Israel lays bare a master class in fidelity.

Amidst considerable political tumult, the tribes of Israel express fidelity to David as their true leader. It is not merely the tribe of Judah (by which David has already been anointed in 2:1-4) that exhibits this faithfulness, but rather "all the tribes of Israel" who come to profess their trust in David's kinship, leadership, and divine blessing. David then solidifies his own fidelity to Israel in his making of a covenant, and the culmination of this mutual profession in David's anointing gathers up the divinely wrought movements of prophecy in a revelation of the Lord's own steadfastness.

Astute preachers would do well to note the lectionary's neglect of verses 6-8. These detail some of the more violent dimensions of David's conquering of Jerusalem. While their descriptions certainly challenge our preferred embrace of David as hero, they nevertheless do not diminish this passage's overwhelming insistence upon the perfection of God's abidance.

- Where and when has the faithfulness of God's presence seemed most abundant? When has your sense of God's faithfulness perhaps been challenged?

### **Psalm 48**

At times, psalms seem to pray within us, lending words to unutterable intimacy between the soul and God. At others, the psalms turn outward, calling out to the world to behold the works and wonder of the Almighty. Psalm 48 is a psalm so outwardly oriented - a passionate, exultant hymn of praise for the One who has preserved his own people and holy city. God has triumphed over all adversity in fidelity and strength, and thus the psalmist and all who hear are called to rejoicing. An eternal dimension emerges in the final connection of the Lord's glory in the establishment of his city for the ages to come: "This God is our God for ever and ever; he shall be our guide for evermore." Just as David's anointing in our first reading heralded a new and blessed event in the story of Israel, the psalmist's praise calls the heart into spirited recognition of the endurance, perfection, and sanctity of the Lord's own work.

- What might this psalm have to say to us in the Church today? Does the imagery of a triumphant God in Jerusalem resonate with how we know, pray to, and worship God in our own context?

## 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Paul addresses the Corinthians in an excerpt that follows his “fool’s speech,” a passage where he has taken upon the persona of a “fool” to challenge those among them who have made false and self-aggrandizing claims to authority. Much of the speech is ripe with irony, and Paul criticizes those who have held up personal triumphs and private revelations as evidence for their own divinely-sanctioned supremacy. He here continues to counter these false claims with a reorientation toward Christ. Even were his own experiences so powerful as to justify boasting, the boast could not be of his own might or holiness, but rather only in the Lord whose power is made “perfect in weakness.” The Greek word for *perfected* in this passage is *teleitai*, and it suggests not so much an immediate bestowal of a perfected state as it intimates a ripening to fullest maturity. Weakness invites us into recognition of and surrender to our dependence upon God. In what the world perceives as weakness, our spirits deepen to be filled by the true power found only in the revelation of Jesus.

- How does false authority differ from the authority of Jesus Christ? What might the authority of Christ inspire from us in terms of our own behavior, prayer, and treatment of others?

## Mark 6:1-13

This passage from the Gospel of St. Mark offers revelatory insight into a life of discipleship. As Jesus and his disciples continue their ministry in Jesus’ own hometown of Nazareth, they are met with the breadth of human response to that which is unexpected: astonishment, incredulity, and even antagonism. One might expect a homecoming to be joyful and rich in blessing, but how often have we returned home, changed after a time away, to find ourselves somewhat distant from those who knew us best? Even for Jesus, a life in God’s service (into which he is knit intimately as the second Person of the Trinity) is rife with complexity. Notably, Mark stands alone among the gospels in mentioning that despite rejection, Jesus “laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.” His work continues even amidst unbelief, and the following description of the commissioning of the disciples is thus imbued with particular power. Though the world may refuse them honor, hospitality, or even dignity, they are to go forth, to travel light in companionship with one another, to seek sustenance among this fledgling community of believers, and to persist in the holy work of their beloved Lord.

There is a delicate irony in Jesus’ instruction to the disciples to “shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against” those who do not receive them. Rabbinic literature features the image of shaking the dust from one’s feet as a ritual act of the faithful Jew upon return to Israel after a journey through unclean lands. Jesus has just been rejected in Nazareth. What might this statement mean regarding his own community? Ultimately it is revealed to be true that hardship, uncertainty, and rejection are just as much a part of discipleship as joy, fruitfulness, and peace. In fair weather and foul, the work of the Word continues to heal and to redeem.

- How do we change how we live out our faith based on the circumstances that surround us? Do we remain authentic to who God has called us to be?
- Where do we find hope amidst the hardships of discipleship?

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