



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Tuesday in Holy Week
April 16, 2019

[RCL] Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

Isaiah 49:1-7

God makes each of us like a polished arrow and our mouths like sharp swords. The image of cold, hard, steel weapons of war stands in stark contrast to the bright and warm image of light. Indeed, God goes on to hide these weapons in quiver and hand and instead chooses to send us into the world as a light to the nations. This is one of the paradoxes we are invited to dwell on in today's readings. This encourages us to contemplate the source of our strength, the kind of strength we have within us and the ways in which we choose to express that strength in the world. Furthermore, it matters for whom and what we intend to exert that strength. When we pursue our own gains, we might be deeply despised and abhorred, but when our cause is one with God's, things are different.

- How do you marshal and reconcile martial imagery in Scripture with the goal of pursuing peace and reconciliation?
- When you feel like you are laboring in vain, what keeps you going? How do you discern whether to keep going or take another direction?

Psalm 71:1-14

This psalm reminds me of how much I appreciate the way church can bring together people of all ages. When it does, my story becomes one within a long lineage of stories. My thread is being woven into a tapestry which appears to have no beginning and no end, and this thread will not slip loose because it is being woven into older threads even as it is becoming an anchor for newer threads. The "I" in this psalm is an individual "I" situated within a collective "I." The steadfast faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ inspires and nourishes us, and the questions of those who are newer to the faith give us the chance to share our testimonies. In witnessing to others, we witness to ourselves again the workings of God in our lives.

- How has the story of your spiritual journey evolved as you've shared it with others?
- What stories of faith struggles in times of trial have helped you when you struggle? Whose stories are they and how have they helped?

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

This passage from 1 Corinthians reminds me of the paradox in today's Old Testament reading, that of weapons which were made by God and then concealed by God. In this epistle, Paul highlights the paradox of wisdom that is foolish and strength that is weak and vice versa. This isn't simply an exhortation to bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly, it is an invitation to re-examine what we conceive of as foolishness and wisdom, strength and weakness. It is an invitation to experience the world through God's senses, to see with God's eyes, to hear with God's ears, to encounter each other with God's heart, and not through the assumptions and frameworks we have developed over time.

- What are some assumptions you hold that should die in this Holy Week and be transformed? What are the steps you can take to make that happen?
- How do you reconcile experiencing the world through God's senses and through society's lenses?

John 12:20-36

The grain of wheat has to fall into the darkness of the earth in order to bear fruit, yet if we walk in the darkness, we do not know where we are going! Perhaps it is as confusing to mix parables as it is to mix metaphors, but it might provide another way of contemplating these familiar themes. For example, does the seed actually die, or does it finally come alive after it falls into the ground? Once it is in the ground, if it resolutely retains its barriers, thinking that it is guarding itself against the darkness, it will truly die. Yet if its barriers are dissolved, it can be nourished by the dark soil and come alive in a new way.

- How might you respond to the darkness in the world in a way that is life-giving to you?
- What is a task or responsibility you have been avoiding that's causing you to feel "stuck" in some way? How are some steps you can take so that you can move forward?

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