



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Pentecost 4**  
**Proper 7 (B)**  
**June 20, 2021**

**RCL: 1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20 or 1 Samuel 17:57-18:5, 10-16; Psalm 133; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41**

### **1 Samuel 17:57-18:5, 10-16**

This is better than Broadway theatre! David returns with the severed head of Goliath, Jonathan, son of Saul, pledges his undying loyalty and love to David, Saul rages and attempts murder, yet holds his handsome young warrior in awe. Though this presentation is operatic, isn't there something of our own lives in this churn of excitable characters, surging emotions, irrational jealousy, and stirrings of the heart? We note that in the midst of these histrionics, God is there (18:12). This vignette offers an invitation to discern the presence of God when we are enduring moments of tumult and high drama. Additionally, we also see the seeds of anger, rage, and jealousy sprouting in Saul, a man modern psychology might pronounce "addicted to his feelings". He symbolizes what happens when one is unable to hold with integrity red-hot emotions.

Let's briefly also unpack a verse that confounds many readers and preachers - "an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house" (18:10). A few chapters before this scene, Saul had been given the gift of prophecy, but now that high voltage power has engulfed him. The hapless king's gifts have become a curse. Saul found himself in proximity to divine energy, but as Carl Jung observed, energy is not friendly! We approach the power of God on our knees with fear and trembling. Woeful Saul lacks the humility and perspective to recognize that his throne and his victories are not his but God's work; he wears the crown but for the grace of God. The king is chosen for service, not glory. Saul symbolizes a temptation we all face – succumbing to the illusion that we are at the center and God should conform to our agenda.

- How might God's grace and presence be breaking through in the more dramatic moments and areas of our lives?

### **Psalm 133**

Our ancestors in faith found much inspiration in this little jewel of a poem! Augustine, for example, read the origin of monastic brotherhoods in these verses, while other interpreters found a summons to gather around the table of the Eucharist. The ecumenists hear a call to Christian unity. How could our generation apply the wisdom of this psalm in this era scarred by political and ecclesiastical polarization? We might

begin by recalling the central place the institution of the family has held in Christian history. Christianity has, however, defined family in rather radical, “untraditional” ways, beginning with Jesus himself. Recall that he relativizes one’s family of origin and elevates those who gather around him as his true “brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35).

Psalm 133 serves as an invitation to transcend the base impulse to regress to tribe, faction, and outmoded, limiting ideas of family. The Lord has blessed us with each other and has inspired wonderfully creative ways of imagining “family”. Our verses lead us to dream of what the human experience could be when we answer the call to “live together in unity.”

- How are we as nations, churches, and individuals being called to redefine family and “live together in unity”? How might we respond to this invitation?

## **2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

Paul highlights powerful truths about faith and the human experience. First, he urges the Corinthians “not to accept the grace of God in vain” (6:1). Paul recognizes that surrendering to God in faith and cooperating with God’s grace are choices that we are invited to make anew every day. We will never arrive at a point where we cruise on autopilot! God grants absolute freedom to say yes or no at any time; there is never compulsion. For Paul, this is the wisdom of God’s love. He recognizes that love is deepest when it is freest, and grace is not something we own, but rather a mystery to which we maintain an attentive openness.

Second, Paul recites an arresting list of hardships he has endured on behalf of God’s work and the people whom he loves. Paul perseveres, despite the unpredictability and vicissitudes of life. Moments of suffering and challenge do not indicate that God is against us. Rather the continued experiences of receiving grace and receiving the gift of faith indicate that God is for us! Authentic hope is anchored in this truth, not in the fickle cycle of bad news/good news of a capricious world.

- What are the challenges and resistances you encounter in saying “yes” to the gifts of faith and grace?

## **Mark 4:35-41**

Let’s begin our reflection where today’s gospel ends – “Who then is this?”

Jesus’ taming of the storm reveals him to be the one who has the power, in the worst and most hopeless of circumstances, to save those who trust and believe in him. Scholars of Mark have suggested that the original audience of this gospel might have been the church at Rome, a community that endured the persecution of Nero. Many Christians turn-coated on their brothers and sisters during this time of trial, and were experiencing a deep sense of shame and regret (this could explain Mark’s many references to the unbelief of the disciples –the audience is invited to see themselves in the story, cf. 4:40).

This was a church reeling, beset by chaos from within and without. Perhaps they were being invited to identify with the disciples in the storm and to recognize the one entity that had the power to deliver them from what appeared to be a hopeless situation. We too will experience moments when we feel we are helpless and desperate, and we might question God's care for us as well. Mark exhorts us to discover and call upon the one whom the wind and sea obey.

- How do you answer the question, "Who is this then?"
- Where are you feeling beset by "windstorms" and "waves" and how do you experience the invitation to call upon Jesus in these moments?

***Brian B. Pinter** is a teacher of religious studies at Fordham Preparatory School in the Bronx and a Pastoral Associate at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in Manhattan.*