

# Central Lutheran Church

## Narrative Lectionary Bible Study - Fall, 2020

### November 11 Lesson

#### Welcome and Introduction

We continue with this weekly “water stop” in our shared covid-19 marathon. Thank you for joining this study, it is so good to be together for holy conversation and to “see” one another on Zoom. A few quick reminders:

1. The narrative lectionary was developed with the goal of hearing lessons that we do not often encounter in the common lectionary. This year we will “travel” through the history of God’s love for the world.
2. These Bible studies are more holy conversations. No previous knowledge is expected, in fact it helps to seek to enter the study as if for the first time. You are invited to attend the Zoom study each week, but the invitation is always open for when it works in your schedule.
3. Christ Care Prayers begin each lesson, it is a time when we pray for one another and the needs of the world. If you have a prayer concern that you do not want to share in front of the group, you can send a private chat to the pastor who is leading the study.
4. Yep, we may break out into conversation groups. Have no fear, one of the pastors will be in each of the groups to help facilitate the conversation.

#### Schedule

September 9 - Genesis 2: 4b-7, 15-17; 3:1-8 (Creation and “fall”)

September 16 - Genesis 15: 1-6 (God’s promise to Abraham/ Sarah)

September 23 - Genesis 37: 3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21 (Joseph’s dreams)

September 30 - Exodus 12:1-3; 13:1-8 (Passover)

October 7 - Exodus 32: 1-14 (Golden Calf)

October 14 - 1 Samuel 1: 9-11, 19-20; 2:1-10 (Hannah and Samuel)

October 21 - 2 Samuel 7: 1-17 (David and Nathan)

October 28 - 1 Kings 17: 1-24 (Elijah and the widow)

November 4 - Jonah 1:1-17; 3: 1-10; 4:1-11 (Jonah)

**November 11 - Isaiah 6: 1-8 (Holy, Holy, Holy)**

November 18 - Jeremiah 36: 1-8, 21-23, 27-28; 31: 31-34 (New Covenant)

November 25 – NO Zoom Study, Thanksgiving Weekend

December 2 - Joel 2:12-13, 28-29 (Merciful God, promise of Spirit)

December 9 - Isaiah 61: 1-11 (Spirit of the Lord)

December 16 - Luke 1:26-45, 46-56 (Annunciation and Magnificat)

December 23 and 30 – NO Zoom Study, Christmas break

January 6 – Zoom Study Resumes

# Narrative Study for Wednesday, November 11

## Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

### Prophets – Touchstone Moments

We begin with what Abraham Heschel taught us a few weeks ago, that the prophets are “some of the most disturbing people who have ever lived: the {people} whose inspiration brought the Bible into being - the {people} whose image is our refuge in distress, and whose voice and vision sustain our faith.” The Prophets, p xxi

The prophets are also people of deep passion, Heschel writes, “the gift [the prophet] is blessed with is **not a skill**, but rather the gift of being guided and restrained, of being moved and curbed... [the prophet’s] task is to deliver the word; as witness, they must bear testimony that the word is divine.” The Prophets, page 26-27

For Heschel the prophets are grounded in “radical amazement.” An image the mystic and teacher Dr Howard Thurman picked up as he reflected: “It is good to remember that God has not left [God]self without a witness in our spirits. There is a Spirit in us that contains our spirit, that provides the secondary consolations which float the big anxieties, that sustains the effort beyond the calculated endurance, that makes the case for the good impulse when the rational judgement sends the mind spinning in the opposite way, that brooks over all weariness and all despair until the change comes and the heart is revived, that holds the confidence in the integrity of the self when the deeds that contradict will not be stilled and the act that destroys goes on its relentless way – it is good to remember that God has not left [God]self without a witness in our spirits.” Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey*, page 133.

What might it mean for lives of faith, hope, love, justice, mercy, kindness (the list goes on), that “radical amazement” is what grounds us? That God’s Spirit does contain our spirit and witnesses to us throughout our lives. The invitation is to remember, call to mind, heart and soul, the moments of God’s love and grace where we experienced that the Spirit “contains our spirit.” That it is true, in all the moments of life, that “God has not left [God]self without a witness in our spirits.”

In the way of the contemplatives, Ignatius calls these a **touchstone experience**. They are moments in your life when you, somehow and in some way,

experienced God's love, presence, grace, all of who / what you might name as God.

Before we can turn to Isaiah, before we can dwell for a moment in his touchstone experience, in his "radical amazement," we begin by pausing to ponder our experiences of God.

Now, this is not something we talk about, something that – strangely – the Church has not done the best job in fostering. Maybe because the Church, the historic Church with the capital "C" has wanted – maybe or definitely – to control the faith or even the experience of God. But there has always been a river running alongside all the institutionalism, a river that cannot be controlled or contained by any human constructions, dogma or doctrine. Ironically, most dogma and doctrine started in the honest experience of God, and people wanting to somehow write that down.

It is a vulnerable place to begin, but do you have a moment you recall, an experience of God, somehow or some way? This may be best in small groups, but we can stay here in the larger group for this, too. Most importantly, only offer your touchstone, only share, if it feels safe enough.

## **Tonight's Lesson: Isaiah 6**

The experience of God, how do we write that down in human words? For Jonah it is a mythic, or literal, big fish that swallowed him up. In contemplative prayer it is interesting to sit with that image, to imagine you were swallowed up. It changed him, for a moment, and then it did not. Such is the challenge of a touchstone moment; it can change us for lifetime or not at all.

Isaiah's experience changes him for life, shapes him as he speaks the hard word to Israel. It shapes him as he offers hope, the most famous of those for us is the promise of Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14, then Isaiah 9:2-7). For his community, years later, Isaiah's "radical amazement" will shape a section of the Bible filled with hope and comfort (Isaiah 39-66, begin looking at 40 and 42) A vision of an intimate God and one of the only moments in the whole Bible when God simply says, "I love you." (Isaiah 43: 4) The Lord of Genesis 2 who will never forget you speaks the promise that you are carved on the palm of God's hand. (Isaiah 49:14-16) The Lord who shaped Handel's Messiah is heard in so many passages, one at the heart of the oratorio is in Isaiah 53: 4-6. Isaiah also calls out "Seek ye the Lord," and in a fit of joy, says that "you shall go out with joy, be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,

and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands." (Isaiah 55: 6, 12) Who is not overwhelmed by Isaiah 58? A passage for this time, when we are called to "repair the breach." In all these images, Isaiah offers a touchstone for each of us, "O Lord, we are the clay and you are the potter, we are all the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64: 8)

### *Lectio Divina*

One of the oldest ways to enter the holy conversation at a Bible study is to spend time reading the lesson slowly, and at least three times. This way is called "lectio divina," or divine reading. You can read the lesson silently, or even out loud if you are in a quiet place. There are many ways to engage in *lectio divina*, here is one way to consider:

1. The first time we read the lesson for the information, the story that is being shared. Here we read with our head, asking what we first noticed?
2. The second time, we slow down and read with our heart. What emotions do you notice as you read and respond or react to in the lesson?
3. The third and final time, really slow down. Perhaps you pause or stop at a verse, linger there. Here you begin to read with your soul. What is God saying in, with and under this story? What is God not saying, in other words, is God speaking or does it seem more like human interpretation at this point. What is liberating or what is troubling?

### **Isaiah 6: 1-6**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."

<sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

## **Conversation and Questions from the Divine Reading**

1. What did you notice? What was interesting, or confusing? What was familiar or unfamiliar?
2. What emotions did you notice as you read? How did you respond or react to the lesson?
3. What is God saying in, with and under this story? What is God not saying, in other words, is God speaking or does it seem more like human interpretation at this point. What is liberating or what is troubling? How are you open to God as you pause for this third reading?
4. What questions do you bring tonight for us to discuss?