

Study Guide Oct. 14, 2018

Readings: Job 23:1-9, 16-17; Psalm 22:1-15; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31

Theme: Sacrifice

This week I will be preaching on the story of the rich, young man who bows at Jesus's feet and asks, "How can I inherit eternal life." Jesus' response is classic Jesus (obey God's commands). When the man tells Jesus he has done that since he was a child, Jesus provokes in him (as he does in us all) a task that seems impossible to do. In so many words, Jesus tells the man if he wants to take that first step into the future...then it's going to cost him.

Like so many characters that come to Jesus, we hardly know anything about this guy. Mark tells us he's a wealthy man. Luke says he's also a ruler. And in Matthew's gospel we know him as the rich "young" ruler. In spite of his age, he is a man of means and a person of power. Perhaps he inherited his wealth. Or perhaps he worked hard to achieve success. Of all the stuff he has acquired in his life, he still doesn't have the one thing his heart desires the most.

As you read the lectionary passages for this week, I hope you will do so with an eye on sacrifice – what it means to the subjects and their authors, as well as for you. What must you give up, or let go of, to follow Jesus into the Kingdom of God? Are you the rich, young ruler? Make sure you also watch the service because there's a twist to this story you may or may not have seen coming.

READ: Job 23:1-9, 16-17; Hosea 6:5-7; Mark 12:33

Life is suffering and sacrifice. No one knows this better than Job. His speech in this text puts us in one fine pickle. "Where is this mighty God in whom I trust?" The ever-faithful Job trusting in his God but nonetheless turning bitter and confused as the realities of life begin to torment him. As his pitiful situation drags on with his friends and family, he wakes up heavily burdened with a new set of complaints for God. "Show yourself so that I may present my case of injustice that has been handed to me." Does his situation sound familiar to you? In the end, we know that Job's heart remains true to God, his life eventually becomes better than before, and those who tried to discourage him are humiliated. The moral of his story is still true today: remain steadfast in our faith, trusting that the worst will soon be over and that our lives may even be better once the storm has passed.

Q: Have you experienced this kind of situation before? How did you feel about God?

Q: What were the effects on your life after weathering the storm?

Q: How would you encourage others who are suffering in this kind of situation?

PRAYER: *Lord God, "give me the strength to do as you command, and command me to do what you will" in Christ name, Amen.* ~ St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

READ: Hebrews 4:12-16; John 1:1-5; Ephesians 6:17; Revelations 1:16

This part of Hebrews lifts up two major theological themes: the power of God's word, and the boldness by which we may draw near to God. This passage teaches those with faith, both strong or barely holding on, to stand firm in the Word of God; to be courageous and remain faithful to the faithfulness of Jesus. Because of his sacrifice for us, we can boldly approach God's throne. But when we take a realistic look at our lives, and what the Word is calling upon us to do, we might see all too clearly how far we really are from truly following Jesus. To grow in faith and find a new confidence in being his followers means having to make a few sacrifices. We are going to have to let go of our way in order to grasp tightly to Jesus' Way. One of the best ways to begin is by actively engaging with the Word of God, and allow him to speak to us through it, so that we may be more faithful in knowing his will for us both as a Christian community and in our own daily lives.

Q: Where do you see your role as a follower of Jesus lacking or wanting to abandon your faith?

Q: How does this passage help you understand the Bible, or see Jesus as the Word? And how might you teach or encourage others to read the Holy Scriptures with you?

READ: Mark 10:17-31, 14:50-52; Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-29

In this story we are confronted by the reality of our dependence on God's mercy for our salvation. Confident in faith, we might be tempted to look down on this young man, or believe the old sermon that he was a good and faithful man but was more attached to the cares of this world than following Jesus. But that's not what the Bible says in any of the three gospel accounts of this story (Mark 14:50-52). The irony is that this devoted man neglected to realize that he was a Child of God, made in the Divine image. He had already inherited eternal life. Jesus was teaching him, and us, to let go of the things that blinded him from seeing this truth. As we strive to be the most faithful followers of Jesus, we must not forget God is merciful, steadfast, and faithful. While our earthly possessions and wealth might give us happiness temporarily, God gave us Jesus, through whom all blessings flow – today and throughout the ages to come.

Q: How would you feel if Jesus asked you to sell all of it as the only way to follow him?

Q: What have you sacrificed in your life to be a follower of Jesus?

Q: How has this story been presented to you in the past? How has it confirmed or changed your point of view after reading it for yourself?

Slow Read: Psalm 22:1-15. Always focus on your breathing as you read and pray.

PRAYER: *Lord God, "give me the strength to do as you command, and command me to do what you will" in Christ name, Amen.*