

Study Guide June 10, 2018

Readings: Genesis 3:8-15; 1 Samuel 8:4-20 (11:14-15); Psalm 138;
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

Theme: Choosing God or Self

God is political, in that the politics of Jesus are the politics of God, which are not always ours. In the reading from 1 Samuel you get a good sense of how God views politics. The Hebrew people want a king so they can be like every other nation. Being a faithful and loving God, the people get what they want – but not without a cost. Without God as their king, the nation of Israel will be divided; resulting in a weaker state. Stronger, more powerful nations will attack; enslaving and scattering God's people all over the ancient Near East. Jesus will come to gather these lost sheep of Israel and bring us back into God's fold. This too comes with a pretty high price tag.

This week's theme is about choosing between putting your faith in God or in human beings. I will focus at the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, when the man and woman decide to be obedient to God or not. If you open your eyes to see the text differently, you will discover there is a common thread of "choice" throughout all of these readings. Choose God as your King or Saul. Then Paul makes us see how our choices between life and death or eternal life. And Jesus, no doubt, speaks to making choices and the results of the choices we make. All in all, each choice depends on our faith. Is it in God, or in ourselves, or both? I would suggest you read the passages in the order that they are in because I suspect that you will see the Gospel in a different light. I know I did.

Read: Genesis 3:8-15

As they hunker down in the garden like children, the man and woman are attempting to hide their trespasses from God who seeks after them, fully aware that something has gone very, very wrong. In this most famous story, God calls out to them, "Where are you?" This is the first question that God asks in Scripture and, as is the case with every good story, it is asked not just of the characters on the page and in the scene, but of every single one of us. At once, the question assumes an answer—we are not where we should be—and poses yet another question—where should we be?

Q: Where are you in this story? And how might God help you change your outcome?

Q: What choices are willing to make in order to save your life?

Prayer: God of Creation, just as you made me in your image help me to live up to that image in all that I do today; making the right choice by placing my faith in you. Amen.

Read: 1 Samuel 8:4-20 (11:14-15)

After centuries of instability and war, they have finally found a strong and wise leader in the prophet Samuel. Yet they sense that Samuel's time is coming to an end, and so they ask him to appoint a king to rule them, as the other nations have. Samuel warns that God alone should be their king and lists the many ways in which human kings tend to abuse their

power. Nevertheless, the people are determined to be like the other nations. In their desire for security and power, they decide to conform to the model of leadership set out by the world around them. As a result, they begin to alienate the leadership of God.

Q: In what ways do you see your country, and its current political system in this reading? How do you compare it with another era in your lifetime?

Q: How do you see Jesus as being the antithesis of this kind of king/kingdom?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, strengthen my will to bend my knees, and my heart and lips to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ, Lord of lords, King of kings. Amen.

READ: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

In this passage, Paul opens with a concise summary of the importance of the resurrection to his proclamation of the faith. It is because we know that God raised Jesus from the dead, and because we know that in the resurrection of Jesus we find our own resurrection, that we trust in God. Paul presents his reliance on Christ and not his own skill or power. This passage presents a beautiful example of the way in which Paul's faith has strengthened him to face criticism and allowed him to "not lose heart" by keeping his focus on the good news.

Q: Looking through Paul's eyes, how has the good news of Jesus' resurrection save you?

Q: How does the message of the resurrection provide you with strength and comfort in the face of difficulty or challenges?

Prayer: Lord Christ, by your life, death, and resurrection you have claimed me. Amen.

READ: Mark 3:20-35

A large crowd gathers around Jesus who sews a rich tapestry of teachings that might seem to be randomly thrown together, but if you look carefully, you might see a pattern: a theme of house, home, and family. God invites us into a life, a new family, and the way into that family depends on the choice we decide to make.

Q: What is Jesus' true home, and who are his true family? What is the demonic, divided house he has come to plunder?

Q: When has the Church been your family, your "brother and sister and mother?"

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for making me your beloved child. Help me to make the choices in life that will show other's your true mercy and glory. Amen.

Slow Read: Psalm 138

This psalm speaks of God's presence "in the midst of trouble." Meditate over these words, and focus on God's presence as you pray for your needs today. Lord be merciful and just.