

Study Guide for August 25, 2018

Readings: 1 Kings 8:1-11, 22-43; Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

Theme: Rituals, Rites, And All the Other Weird Stuff in the Bible

This week I am borrowing from a bible study written by the Rev. JK Melton, that originally ran August 26, 2012 on the episcopal digital network. However, my weekly message will come from John's strange and inquisitive chapter 6 where Jesus presents himself in a way that will not only confuse most of his followers, but will also offend them. Finally, Jesus and I have something in common! I hope that you find Melton's insights and questions intriguing. I have also added a little bit of my own thoughts, so it's not total plagiarism.

One theme I found throughout these selected readings are the rituals, rites and other things that we have in our church doctrine and worship. So as you read these passages, I invite you to try to identify some of these practices; i.e. icons, prayer, communion. As you find them, I would encourage you to see yourself in these practices and asks yourself which one's are important (or not) to you.

I am grateful for all your support, and for your participation in our worship and discipleship making. If you are interested in taking this further in your life, or learning how to lead a group study with a few friends, let me know and I will help guide you and nurture you along your journey.

READ: 1 Kings 8:1-11, 22-43

What a day it must have been to dedicate the Temple at Jerusalem. The dedication of the temple can stand in for many things and help us expand our imaginations: the dedication of our own churches, the dedication of our gifts, the dedication of our lives. Indeed, we need to dedicate ourselves daily to the work that God has given us to do. The pageantry of this event certainly helped to set the scene and reveal its importance. We must find ways to commit deeply to our own dedication to God, so that people may come to hear God's great name because of the way we live our lives.

Q: How can we more fully dedicate our lives to God, making an offering of ourselves, our souls and bodies?

Q: What do we need to do so that we may always deepen our commitment to God and grow into deeper dedication?

Prayer: Gracious God, accept my heart and soul today as I dedicate my life to you through Jesus Christ. Amen.

READ: Ephesians 6:10-20

The imagery of this passage is tricky. Most of us live far from military imagery, and even farther from military imagery of the Roman Empire. With youth groups, I have done an activity where we re-imagine this text using modern and personal metaphors. Cell phones, Facebook, cars, and any number of modern devices – even lucky shoes – have been suggested by these youth. How might you re-imagine this passage to convey Paul's point? We must put on the whole armor of God because our whole lives must be dedicated to God's work. Christ never asks for a little bit. As a result, the closing thought of this passage is of vital importance. Paul's prayer must become our own. We must pray to be alert and to persevere. We must also make a bold witness for the gospel.

Q: What is your armor that you wear out into the world?

Q: What would our lives look like if we lived into Paul's prayer?

Prayer: Lord Christ, be with me today and protect me from the things of this world that seek to chase me away from you. Amen.

READ: John 6:56-69

The disciples found this teaching difficult. I think we are a lot like them. Jesus is teaching us the words of spirit and life, but there are those among us who do not believe, and often Jesus' teaching is just plain difficult. Truly, much ink has been spilled trying to figure out what it means to eat his flesh and drink his blood! I'm not sure that it is helpful to become bogged down in those theological debates. Rather, what does it mean to nourish the spirit and live by it instead of the flesh? Jesus asks the twelve if they wish to leave. Peter answers that there is nowhere to go; Jesus gives the word of eternal life. As we know, it is easy to turn to sources other than Jesus for sustenance. As Jesus says, those things – that is, the flesh – are useless.

Q: Jesus invites you to live and dwell in his heart. How are you accepting this offer?

Q: In what ways are you taking Jesus' words of eternal life, and feasting on them?

Q: What does this imagery remind you of?

Slow Read: Psalm 84

As you read, think about how all of creation is God's house. Jesus offers you an open invitation to dwell here and make your home in him and with him.

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for opening your home and heart to me this day. Amen