

Study Guide for September 9, 2018

Readings: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23; Psalm 125; James 2:1-17; Mark 7:24-37

Theme: God does not discriminate

All the readings for this Sunday seem to point toward mercy and justice, reminding us of the command that Jesus so often taught and illustrated for us; That you should love your neighbor as yourself. I believe each one of these passages remind us why this commandment is important for us today.

It was difficult for me to pick just one of these readings to preach on, for they are all perfect sermons in their own right. But then Nike began to run it's latest advertising campaign featuring former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, whose protest intended to draw attention to police violence against African Americans. And the country became ignited and divided over again. Tune in to our message to find out how I connect this protest with Jesus.

So many times, in our interactions with others, especially with strangers, we find it difficult to trust; especially a person whose opinion differs from our own. We have learned that it can be foolhardy to give someone the "benefit of the doubt," to enter a relationship by suspending judgment and assuming the person's motivation is good unless we are proven wrong. Human beings suffer from a deep insecurity that pushes us to create rules that give status and value to some while denigrating others. I hope these passages will awaken you to such folly. I hope that they will help you see that Jesus is often on the other side of those lines that we love to draw.

READ: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

The ancient wisdom of Proverbs reminds us that rich and poor, neighbor and stranger, even the just and unjust are all creatures of God. Perhaps our daily encounters do require us to be prudent, and we can blend prudence with a gracious recognition of our shared humanity. We can choose to act with justice and compassion, and to value integrity over prejudice or greedy self-interest.

Q: Besides physical and material support, how can we "share our bread with the poor"?

Q: Describe an occasion when you have observed someone giving generously of his or her time, attention, labor, or some other resource.

Q: What would you be willing to do or say to defend a stranger against injustice?

Prayer: Lord God, hear my prayer and plead my cause, for I am poor and rely on your abundance of mercy, justice and grace. Amen.

READ: James 2:1-17; Romans 1:16-17, 2:10-13; Mark 12:14; Deut. 10:17-21

James reminds us that when we genuinely trust God's power and love, we cannot turn our backs on the poor or show favor to the rich based on superficial distinctions. James then shifts gears to the topic of faith *and* works (not Faith vs. Works). Since neither is viable without the other, we must look to the true source of life in both. We cannot say we have faith and then act unlovingly by showing favoritism or partiality to one person over another. The superficial faith that does not urge us to action for the sake of God's reign and love of God's children is truly dead and useless.

Q: Why is partiality a sin? Explain why this does or doesn't make sense?

Q: Think of a time when you met a person whose socio-economic condition was greatly different from your own. How did you feel? How would it feel if your positions were reversed?

Q: What actions might you take to express your faith as you now understand it? In what ways might your faith grow if you take those actions?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me today to see others through your eyes, and faithfully treat them as if I am doing to you. Amen.

Read: Mark 7:24-37; Matthew 15:21-28

This is the passage that doesn't present Jesus in the best light, thus we must look a little deeper to find their significance to early Christians, and their importance for us. We see God is present and powerfully active in the world through Jesus' miraculous works. And by these two stories we begin to see how God's power can transform and restore the world's division and isolation. Jesus is a long way from home, and from the children of Israel for whom his ministry began. But then Jesus extended his compassionate ministry beyond his own ethnic boundaries. He tells everyone to keep quiet about it but they proclaim the news far and wide. The power of God is present, among us, and cannot be contained even though it has not yet been fully revealed.

Q: How do these stories move you outside of our own boundaries or our comfort zone to proclaim the gospel?

Q: What kind of joy or gratitude do you have in your heart that wants to be shared? And how is God directing you to put this faith to action?

Q: What are some differences you see between Mark and Matthew's account?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, open my eyes, my heart, and my mouth to proclaim Jesus today. Amen.

Slow Read Psalms 125 and meditate on how much is expected of God's faithful people.