

**First United Methodist Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Lectionary Study Guide**

For use the week of January 14-20, 2019

2nd Sunday After the Epiphany

January 20, 2019

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Isaiah 62:1-5

^{62:1} For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. ² The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. ³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴ You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Commentary

Third Isaiah (one of three prophets that contributed to the full book of Isaiah) preached to a mix of the previously exiled Judahite elite and the poor who remained behind during the exile. He encouraged them to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The exodus from Babylon was not nearly as glorious as they thought it might be—life was harsh economically, intermarriages occurred, their Jewish religious practices were changing and the Canaanite influence on their culture created great anxiety. Third Isaiah moves away from preaching about practical problems and moves to creating a grand vision of restoration in their minds and claims a new name for it—Zion. He typically does not make a sharp distinction between the outer physical city of Jerusalem and its inner spirit. Likewise, sometimes the description of Zion is seen, but not as an actual physical restoration, but as an eschatological vision—a city and a people transformed at the end of time.

Reflection

Third Isaiah anticipated that God would restore and vindicate (make righteous) the ruined city of Jerusalem. Would this come about through a mighty divine act or by means of painstaking human effort? How do you perceive God acting in history? How do human and divine initiatives combine to create change?

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

^{12:1} Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Commentary

Often, Paul addressed issues in Corinth that arose because the Corinthians, who belonged to an end-time community, still had to interact with the unbelieving culture around them. He turns here to divisive issues within the believing community itself—head coverings, abuses at the Lord's Supper, taking communion unworthily, ecstatic speech, disorderly worship—and practical advice is given to restore unity and build community. Members of the body came from a variety of backgrounds and classes (Jew and Gentile, slave and free), but all were to belong together and be affirmed equally by their Christian baptism by the same Spirit into one community. This radical assertion and the way it was lived out in love by the early church was a direct challenge to the deeply divided Greco-Roman society and a prime reason the church grew rapidly—especially among groups at the margins.

Reflection

Paul believed that the Spirit gives believers diverse gifts. What different gifts have you received? How might you better recognize, affirm and use these gifts for the benefit of all?

John 2:1-11

^{2:1} On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take

it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Commentary

John's story of Jesus is different from that of the other three Gospels. To understand what John is saying about the heavenly Father and Jesus, we must look carefully at his basic assumptions. The writer of John assumes incarnation: Jesus is the Word of God transformed into human flesh. He further assumes that the incarnated God brought—and brings—the world to a moment of crisis and decision now, not later. God's full glory and eternal life are both available now by faith. John does not assume (as the Synoptic Gospels and Paul do) that God will judge the world someday when Christ returns to resurrect the dead and usher in God's new creation. John assumes that the world is judged now by Jesus' hour (his death, resurrection, and ascension). These assumptions underlie the miracle at Cana. For instance, the reference to Jesus' "hour" ties the story to the end of Jesus' life and the dawning of a new era. People must decide now to believe it or not. A divine sign, or revelatory event, shatters our conventional explanations of why and how things happen. Some, like the steward who was perplexed by the sudden appearance of more wine, try to reshape or explain the event to fit our categories of reality and conventional reasoning. Others, like the disciples (sometimes), allow our expectations to be shattered and reshaped by the extraordinary transformation of water into wine—or other God-inspired happenings. This is a story of the abundance, extravagance, transformation, and new possibilities that God offers.

Reflection

The disciples allowed for the possibility of God breaking into their conventional world in extraordinary ways. How do you allow for such a possibility in your world? How do you respond?

Responsive Psalter

Psalms 36:5-10

^{36:5} Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁶ **Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.**

⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ **They feast on the abundance of your house,**

and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

¹⁰ **O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**