



2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE
Monthly Devotions
January 2019

Author: Pastor Kent Wilson

Dear Church Council Members,

We all have our favorite Bible Stories. Tonight, I hope you'll enjoy diving into one of mine. It's the story of Moses...and the burning bush...and especially how reluctant he was to be the leader God wanted.

The story is found in Exodus, chapters 3 and 4. I'm hoping you've all had a chance to read these two chapters on your own prior to tonight's meeting. But if not, here's a quick summary before we dive right in to a few key sections.

Briefly, Moses was born an Israelite at a time when the Egyptian Pharaoh was killing off all the babies under two-years of age. Thankfully his mother and sister couldn't bear to see him perish. So, they hid him for a while and then eventually found a creative way to present him to one of Pharaoh's daughters who had pity on him and raised him in her own home. But as he got older, knowing his heritage, he had a penchant for justice for his own people—so much so that at one point he actually killed an Egyptian for mistreating a fellow Israelite. As you can imagine, that didn't go over well in Egypt and so Moses had to escape Egypt and carve out a new life for himself elsewhere.

Eventually he married and started tending sheep for his father-in-law. That's when he came across this burning bush from which God speaks (beginning of Exodus, chapter 3).

So, there are a couple of things going on here that I find fascinating. The first is in verses 7 and 8 of chapter 3. To get into this, could I please ask for a volunteer to read verse 7 of Exodus chapter 3 (and the first part of verse 8—before all the big names) right now?

[pause while the person reads the verse].

Thanks for reading. I love the fact that God says, "I KNOW their sufferings...and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians..." I love the fact that God can identify with the plight of people who suffer. This is not the God of Bette Middler's "From a Distance" song. This is a God that sees up close and personal what's going on. It's like a company CEO who actually gets out of the plush office and checks out first-hand what his or her workers are dealing with on the factory floor.

I'm pretty sure Moses liked this part too. After all, he was an Israelite too and, like them, had been longing for God to come down and deliver them.

But then we get to the big-time surprise in verse 10! Could one of you please volunteer to read verse 10 from chapter 3 right now?



[pause while the person reads the verse]

Wow, God's way of delivering is to ask Moses to do it! Can you imagine being Moses at this point? His head must have been spinning. I can imagine Moses saying something along the lines of, "WAIT a minute! I thought YOU were going to deliver them!!!! Hold on here!!!!"

If Moses said that, Scripture doesn't record it. BUT, and this is big, what Moses DID offer was a bunch of excuses! FIVE of them! And that's the 2nd part of the story that I find fascinating. Let's check out those excuses right now, starting with chapter 3, verse 11.

Excuse #1 (chapter 3, verse 11)

"Who am I that I should Go to Pharaoh...."

This is the classic "I'm not good enough" excuse. You know...not enough knowledge, experience, or notoriety to get the job done. Have you ever used that one yourself? I have too. But God responds in verse 12 with re-assurance. God will be with him.

Excuse #2 (chapter 3, verse 13)

If "they ask me, 'what is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

This excuse is Moses' attempt to say that he and God are not all that close. He can't represent someone he barely even knows. But of course, in verse 14 God reveals God's name, which interestingly enough is not a noun but rather, a verb. "I am who I am."

Excuse #3 (chapter 4, verse 1)

"but suppose they do not believe me..."

In this excuse Moses claims to lack the ability of persuasion. So, God gives him that gift in the form of some supernatural kinds of powers. Kryptonite kind of stuff. That should take care of that but, well, no. Instead we find:

Excuse # 4 (chapter 4, verse 10)

"O my Lord, I have never been eloquent...."

In this excuse Moses claims to lack even basic communication skills. But God promises to be with his mouth and teach him what to speak.

Excuse #5 (chapter 4, verse 13)

"O, my Lord, please send someone else!"



This is not so much an excuse but, rather, what Moses probably wanted to say all along. The excuses were just feeble rationalizations for the deeper truth...Moses simply didn't want to do what God wanted him to do! Moses wanted someone else to do it!

At this point God actually gets a little angry and brings Moses' brother Aaron (and sister Miriam) in on the adventure too. But not without keeping Moses' role very much in play.

I love this story because it reminds me that the kinds of people that God uses are often very ordinary and, at times, even cowardly. When we watch "The Ten Commandments" movie on TV we often see Moses portrayed as a larger than life figure, which is great if you want to sell movie tickets and commercials for advertising. But what we've just read in the Bible paints a more realistic picture. Moses was a person on the run, just trying to make it through life when he is suddenly called to a higher purpose. Did he jump at the chance? Not so much. But God used him anyhow. And God can use you too...as leaders...in this congregation...right now...this very night...Just make sure your actions and decisions are guided by the kind rescuing and redeeming love that God has for all of us!

[Note: I hope you found this helpful. Now would be a good time to ask for prayer requests and then ask for a volunteer to pray, thanking God for the story of Moses, lifting up in general terms all of the prayer concerns that have been mentioned, and for the mission of your church as a whole and for the rest of the meeting to follow.]





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE
Monthly Devotions
February 2019

Author: Pastor Chris Young

At the moment, what is your favorite book of the Bible and why?

Not Leviticus?!

I am assuming no one said “Leviticus” is their favorite book☺ I often find that people have good intentions of reading the Bible from beginning to end, only to get stuck in Leviticus and give up. So let's see if we can mine some treasures from its pages that will help us through.

“Leviticus” – the book's title comes from the Greek meaning “the book of the Levites”. The Levites were the tribe of Israel chosen by God to be priests. They were thought to be descendants of Moses' brother, Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel. The first chapters are often referred to as the “Priestly Code”, and describe offerings, rituals, laws and rites for the people of Israel. The second part contains laws that are referred to as the “Holiness Code”, a guide to the people for how to live in the presence of God's holiness. While many of the teachings are for a specific time and place and sound strange to us today, there are some teachings that are timeless.

In our reading for today from the Holiness Code section of Leviticus, we hear some of God's instructions through Moses for the people of Israel. They are about to end their wilderness wanderings and enter the promised land of Canaan. (The headings for each section of verses are added for clarity.)

Leviticus 19: 1-4, 9-18

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

²Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them:

Be Holy (Set apart for service to God)

You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. ³You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. ⁴Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the LORD your God.

Be Giving (Share what you have with the poor)

⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

Be Honest (Be someone people can trust, someone God can trust)

¹¹You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. ¹²And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD.



Be Fair (Put yourself in your neighbors shoes)

¹³You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. ¹⁴You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

Be Just (Be an advocate for human rights for others)

¹⁵You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. ¹⁶You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

Be Love (Show mercy, forgiveness, and loyalty to each other)

¹⁷You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Jesus, the fulfillment of God's teachings

Close to 1,000 years later, Jesus grows up with the teachings and guidance of the Hebrew Torah (Writings attributed to Moses). As he begins his ministry, he says...

Matthew 5:17

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

How do you see Jesus, in his life, fulfilling these teachings? (opt. – go section by section)?

How do you see us, as the local church, currently fulfilling these teachings (be specific)?

Where and how might Jesus be calling us to fulfill these teachings in new ways?

Matthew 22:37-40

³⁷He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Prayer

Lord, bless those gathered around this table tonight with a vision for the church that fulfills your teachings and bears your love. Guide us always by your Word. Amen.





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE
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March 2019

Author: Pastor Rita Bair

Deuteronomy 5 - 1 Samuel 17: “God Gave us the Law; Now What Do We Do?”

Moses brought the Ten Commandments down the mountain in the Book of Exodus. Throughout Exodus and Leviticus those ‘commandments’ are fleshed out in more detail, reflecting the complexities of daily life, and the necessity for helping people answer the hard questions about living in close quarters. After wandering in the desert through the book of Numbers, Deuteronomy relates the importance of the covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel. Again, and again we hear that if Israel follows and observes the laws given by God, the nation will prosper, for *‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me’*. (Deut 5:6)

Read Deut 6:4-9. Keeping the precepts and laws of the Lord was critically important to the Israelites. *Do we as church communities emphasize the life-sustaining laws of God? How might we today frame the laws as ‘gifts’, rather than ‘burdens’? Can you give an example?*

Read Deut 31:1-7 – After leading the people of Israel for so long, Moses is forbidden entry into the Promised Land. Moses anoints Joshua to take the leader role. Moses does not seem angry but accepts God’s role for him. *What leadership qualities do you see in Moses?*

Read Joshua 24:20-28. In the Book of Joshua, the people finally cross into the land God promised to their ancestors. God directs Joshua in battle, in order to establish territories for the twelve tribes. Joshua builds an altar on Mt. Ebal and reads the Book of the Law to all the people to remind them of their covenant with Yahweh. Each tribe receives their land allotment, and it seems that all is set for the nation to flourish in peace. Joshua gathers the people at Shechem and reminds them once more of their promises. *In the reading, do you get a sense that it will be hard for the people to keep the covenant?*

Read Judges 2:16-21. Without Joshua as a single leader, the tribal leaders act as leaders of their own tribes in an effort to keep their lands from losing their lands. Some of the ‘judges’ act justly as rulers, but none are very successful in keeping the people from following neighboring ‘gods’ or the Covenant. The terrible story of the inhospitable Gibeonites (the deadly assault of the concubine and the warfare that follows) illustrates the breakdown of the tribal relations. Toward the end of the book



(18:1, 19:1, 21:25) we hear this sentiment: In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes. *What have the people forgotten?*

Read Ruth 1:15-17. In great contrast to the perverse spirit of the Israelites in Judges, the widow Naomi and her widowed daughter-in-law Ruth show great loyalty and faithfulness to God and each other. In this way, they are examples of Covenant faithfulness, a welcome respite and happy ending from the previous book!

Read 1 Samuel 10:1. Samuel himself grew up in the temple, serving the old priest Eli. After Eli's death, people recognize in Samuel the makings of a great leader. The Ark of the Covenant, stolen by the Philistines, brought them no end of trouble, and they returned it to the house of Israel. Samuel, now a military leader, continues to 'judge' Israel into old age. His sons, however, are not as faithful as their father. So, the elders of Israel beg Samuel to appoint a king over them, rather than one of his sons. After much searching, the young Saul is anointed king. He does not always listen to the LORD, and as we shall see, jealousy fills his reign. As we shall see, the young David will soon take the role of leader and king.

The Covenant and the Law were given as gift. In this brief outline, *what human characteristics make it so difficult for the Israelites (and us!) to keep to the boundaries of the Covenant established by God?*





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE

Monthly Devotions

April 2019

Author: Pastor Janine Foster

1 Samuel 18 – 1 Chronicle 2

- Kingdoms United
 - Each of the 12 tribes of Israel were loosely tied together by the rulership of judges
 - Because of outside threats, the 12 tribes want to come together under one king
 - Saul is that transitional king
 - Saul's leadership
 - Anointed by Samuel
 - Military king
 - Bridge between season of judges and season of kings
 - David is being prepared to be king during the end of Saul's reign
 - David's leadership
 - Unites the northern and southern tribes and expands the empire
 - Makes neutral Jerusalem the capital and brings Ark of the Covenant there
 - Extremely successful- trust in Jerusalem and David's line continuing forever
 - Keeps kingdom together in face of civil war
 - Uses power for evil- Bathsheba/Uriah → beginning of the end
 - Solomon's leadership
 - Time of great wealth
 - Builds temple and takes on other major building projects
 - Unfair distribution of wealth and an incompetent successor son contribute to the fall of the united kingdom
- Kingdoms Divided
 - Judah- Southern Kingdom
 - Tribes of Judah and Benjamin
 - Kept Jerusalem
 - 350 years of rulers in David's line
 - On a hill so not great for farming or trade
 - Israel- Northern Kingdom
 - Other 10 tribes
 - 200 years of kings not related to David
 - Fertile land near water
 - 8/19 kings killed by assassination



- Near Canaanites so they had to put up with Baal worship

So that's a lot! If you would like a more detailed outline, check out enterthebible.org. For this study we will focus on Michal, David's first wife, and her role in his kingship.

First, it's important to remember that marriage during David's time and marriage during our time are two different things. In Biblical times, marriage was almost entirely used for financial or political gain. Today, thankfully, marriages are founded on mutual love and respect.

Each section has a single verse, a summary of what happened, any other important information, and then a question to ponder. In between each section is a brief description of what happened in between the passages we will focus on.

Grab your Bible and read each full passage below. Discuss what stuck out to you and/or the question provided for 3-5 minutes.

- 1 Samuel 18: 17-29 – “Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David” (vs 20)
 - Saul plans to get David killed, but instead David is victorious in war and wins the hand of Saul's younger daughter Michal
 - She loved him which was not necessary for marriage at the time

Question to ponder: Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney notes, “Michal is the only woman in scripture said to love a man who is not her son.”¹ How might that come into play later in Michal's story?

[Jonathan intercedes for David]

- 1 Samuel 19:8-17 – “David's wife Michal told him, ‘If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.’” (vs 11)
 - Michal saves David from Saul's wrath

Question to ponder: Has there been a time in your life where you had to let go of something/someone even though it was hard? How do you think Michal might have felt?

[Lots of life happens]

- 1 Samuel 25:42-44- “Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Palti son of Laish, who was from Gallim.” (vs44)
 - David marries several other women. Michal is remarried to Palti

Question to ponder: Legally in this time, men could have multiple wives, but women were only allowed to have one husband. What might it mean that Michal has been married off again?

¹ <https://www.wilgafney.com/2018/07/>



[Politically motivated leads everything]

- 2 Samuel 3:12-16 – “He said, ‘Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall never appear in my presence unless you bring Saul’s daughter Michal when you come to see me.’” (vs 13)
 - David asks for his wife Michal back for a political move. Her husband comes with her and then he is sent away.

Question to ponder: Is David calling Michal back good news or bad news for Michal? Or maybe both?

[Arc of Covenant Moved to Jerusalem]

- 2 Samuel 6:14-23 – “As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.” (vs 16)
 - Arc is being moved. David dances mostly naked. Michal “despised him in her heart.” She calls him out, he says it was in honor of God, and she has no children.

Question to ponder: Is Michal justified in her response to David? Why or why not?

- Final thoughts:
 - How is God moving in and through you as a result of this study?
 - Have you learned something new?
 - What challenged you?
 - How does this apply to your life?

Let us pray: Good and gracious God we give you thanks for bringing us together today to dwell in your word. We know that you are with us, you remain with us, in the joys and challenges of life. You remained with David, your anointed one, even though he messed up again and again. You remained with Michal as she struggled through unrequited love, being used as a political pawn, humiliation, and childlessness. We know that you are with us, no matter what we might be experiencing in life. Bless us as we go from this place that your love might overflow from us into the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE
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May 2019

Author: Pastor Doris Mars

Esther 4:14b

Timing is everything!

**“Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”
(NRSV)**

In the comedy world it is common knowledge that the timing of a joke punch line is critical to the success of the joke (i.e. raucous laughter).

In the parenting world timing is important in the birth process and throughout a child's life as you teach, challenge and even punish during development.

In the leadership world the timing of strategies and actions is important to achieving outcomes of goals. Engaging the “how” and “when” in pursuit of goals is a leaders ongoing task. **Timing is everything!**

Church leaders must include this timing challenge in their discernment to serve on all levels of the church. Congregation council leaders have by now been voted and installed to serve for a year. May is the month that many synods are conducting assemblies which include voting on leadership positions. By now the ELCA has made first call assignments to regions. Candidates, synods and congregations are discerning and conducting interviews for first calls. Leaders on all levels of the church should be asking, “is this the time for my leadership in the church?”

“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (NIV)

Esther 4:14b brings us a word about leadership timing. At a critical point in the progression of her role as queen, Esther is challenged to see the timing of her leadership as important to saving her people. Mordecai reminds her that Haman's plot to kill the Jews would also include her death even though she is in the king's house. To remain silent is no guarantee that she would not be killed. Mordecai further reminds her that, “relief and deliverance for the Jews will rise from another place, but she and her father's family will perish.” So maybe, just maybe, her leadership for an appointed time is for an appointed purpose. **Timing is everything!**

As council leaders in your congregation you may think of your leadership position as just filling a seat. However, maybe Esther's story will inspire you to reflect on the timing of your leadership call. What things are happening in your congregation context? What



opportunities in community are calling your congregation for response? What decisions is God calling your leadership to address? How can your leadership further the mission of God's people at this appointed time? **Timing is everything!**

“What’s more, who can say but that God has brought you into the palace for such a time as this?”

(The Living Bible)

Prayer: For all leaders in the church

Gracious God, may the call to leadership in your church be according to your perfect will “for such a time as this”, in Jesus name. Amen.





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE Monthly Devotions June 2019

Author: Ms. Brenda Gibson

Will your relationship with God be strong enough when trials come?

Read: Job 1-2

The Bible is full of truth and wisdom from God's own words and from stories of people throughout their lifetime—we can learn so much from it. The book of Job shows us the breadth and depth of human suffering in one man's life. We see suffering in health (Job 2:7), suffering in the loss of property (1:14-17), and suffering in the tragic death of family members (1:18-19). We also listen in on a discussion between God and Satan (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7), in which God delights in the upright life of Job and is willing to allow Satan to test Job's faithfulness. "When Job's three friends hear about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes to go and meet with him and comfort him." (Job 2:11)

Questions to Consider

- 1) How did Job know that God was always with him?
- 2) What items do you use to help guide you during your personal devotion time with God? (*Journal, Bible, Candle, etc.*)
- 3) How do you think Job maintained his faithfulness without access to the items you have today?
- 4) How are you cultivating friends and developing mentors who will comfort you in times of need?
- 5) Will your relationship with God be strong enough when trials come?

The Bible is packed with powerful books and verses to continually fill our hearts and minds by memorizing and meditating on them. God's word offers us light and truth for our days and encourages a closer walk with him. It gives us hope, comfort, and peace for even the most difficult of times.

If you've never read through the entire Bible, or even if you've read it through many times, it's always well worth the time to give focus and attention to God's word of truth and wisdom.



Closing Prayer

Dear Lord,

Thank you for your precious book of faith. Help us to always search for your truth and wisdom that we may maintain our faithfulness and endure our trials. We pray for stronger faith and a right perspective to see our situation through your eyes and to know you are always with us.

In Your Holy Name We Pray,
Amen





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE Monthly Devotions July 2019

Author: Deacon Jean Wise

If you were to describe a wise person, what word would you choose?

In 2010 I learned I would become a grandmother. I didn't want just any name for this precious grandchild to call me - I wanted something special.

At first this presented an identity crisis for me – I am not old enough to be a grandmother, I thought. An unknown author wrote: "It's amazing how grandparents seem so young once you become one."

But then I embraced this new adventure and decided to honor the passage by carefully selecting a new name. I wanted it to be just the right name – representing how I saw myself and exemplifying this new role.

I talked to many other people asking what their grandchildren call them or what they called their grandparents. By the way, this is a great conversation starter and most people tell great and unique stories about the names.

I searched book stores and Amazon and bought two books about grandparent names. One lists over 700 names for grandmother and grandfather. Both books categorized the names as traditional, playful, or ones that honor heritages and ancestors.

On the silent retreat I attended around this same time, I read Robert Wick's book, *Crossing the Desert*. In this book Wicks tells about the ancient desert fathers and mothers in the 4th century who provided guidance on how to live. The book companioned me on the retreat on many levels including providing me with a grandmother name.

A desert mother was called Amma. Amma refers to a wise woman, a play on words for me since my last name is Wise. And Amma nurtured the spiritual formation of others – the key role grandmothers have in the lives of their children and grandchildren. As a spiritual director and Deacon, I hope to foster people closer to God.

I am Amma.

Entering into a new role seems easier with some type of ritual and selecting a name to describe this new chapter in my life initiates this rite of passage for me.

Some people warned me that the child would name me. But I hoped to can still influence that by suggesting, "Come to Amma." And with my daughter saying, "Let's go to Amma's house."



Now I have four precious grandkids now and am no longer called Amma, but I hope they still come to me for wisdom. Yep, they changed my name and made it their own – and even more endearing to my heart and soul. My new grandmother nickname now is: AMMIE!!

Discussion

What grandparent names are used in your family? Share some stories.

How can older generations teach wisdom to younger generations?

Look up some of the following passages. What do they tell us about wisdom?

- Psalm 90:12
- Proverbs 1: 7
- Proverbs 3: 7, 13
- Proverbs 4: 5-9
- Ecclesiastes 2:26
- Proverbs 16: 16
- Proverbs 19: 20
- Proverbs 17: 28
- Proverbs 11: 2



How will you as an individual grow in wisdom this year and how as a council can the group grow in wisdom?

Close with prayer

Dearest Lord Creator, we pray for the knowledge to grow in wisdom. Not for the wisdom that leads to power or fortune, but the wisdom that leads to faith and love. Guide us to your truths and give us courage and insight to walk alongside others as we of all ages worship and serve you.





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE Monthly Devotions August 2019

Author: Pastor Kristin Hunsinger

Hearing & Responding to God's Call

Opening Prayer – feel free to take prayer requests for the community, lifting up the concerns of those gathered and setting apart your time together. Or if you need a format, you can adapt the following prayer.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, shield the joyous. We especially lift up those who are on our hearts and minds ... Guide our conversations and our work this *day/night* and help us to listen for your voice and show forth your love in our words and actions. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Reflection

For the fact that August is over 2/3 of the way through the year, it has become a month of new beginnings. While the weather probably hasn't changed much, with the start of the school year, summer is officially drawing to a close. Very soon (if not already) all of those things that took a summer break – Sunday school, Bible studies, choirs – will be starting back up. That makes this a great time to take a breath, pause, and reflect on what God is calling you to do in your community (both within and outside your church walls) as the fall draws closer. If you have a mission and/or vision statement, now might be a good time to pull it out and pray about how to live into it for the rest of the year. And the fact that this month corresponds with reading the prophets (and Lamentations) is great timing.

Throughout the Old Testament, God has called his chosen leaders and prophets in various ways. Moses was called when a voice spoke from a bush that was on fire but not burning – an event sure to catch his attention. Samuel was called by a voice as if in a dream, although he needed an older and wise mentor in Eli to help him understand that it was God calling.

However, through much of the Old Testament to this point, the leaders of Israel have been born into the work of their family. While it is true that God did regularly call ordinary people to lead or speak a needed word to God's people – it was far more common for the next leader to be the son of the last. After all, how many genealogies have you read (or maybe skimmed) so far! And that makes sense, because to this point you have read the family history of God's people. You know who they are and where they've come from. You know who God is and what God has done for God's people.



You've read through the beautiful poetry of the psalms as you read through the ancient song book for the daily life of God's people.

However, if you are following the readings for the year, you are now to the prophets and the prophets are different. Instead of being a family history or a song to sing, each prophet is a person who is called by God to deliver a message to God's people. The prophets did not choose this work. Instead, they were chosen – called by God. A prophet's call story is incredibly important to understanding the prophet's message and ministry. After all, they don't have a family tree to fall back on. They only have a message, and it's rarely a popular one. And the call stories of the 3 major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) are the most well-known, powerful, and unique.

I encourage you to read the call stories of Jeremiah & Ezekiel (and Isaiah if there is time). Or if there is less time, pick one (personally Jeremiah is my favorite). As you read or hear the story, listen for what God is asking each to do, how the prophet responds, and how God prepares or equips each prophet for the work he is called to do.

- Isaiah 6:1-13
- Jeremiah 1:4-19
- Ezekiel 2:1-3:11

Questions for Discussion

- If you read multiple stories – which one resonates with you more than another, and what about the story stands out?
- What is God asking the prophet(s) to do?
- How do the prophets feel about this? How did they respond?
- If you were in their shoes, how would you feel about this?
- How did God prepare or equip each prophet for the work they are called to do?

Wrapping up & Looking Ahead

Did you notice that each prophet is touched on the mouth – a seraph touches Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal (of cleansing and forgiveness), God touches Jeremiah's mouth giving him the words, and Ezekiel literally eats the words as a scroll is placed in his mouth. For each of these prophets, there is a physical touch as the word becomes a part of them.

While we may not (at least all of us) have call stories like these prophets, in Holy Communion the bread and wine, body and blood touches our lips. We are both called and equipped by God to speak God's word for the world. As you get back into ministry after the summer, take another look at your mission or vision statement. Or simply take a few moments to reflect as a group on questions like these:

- what God is doing in your community and where God might be calling you?
- Is there a ministry that is floundering that you need to let go so something new can flourish?



- Or is there a ministry that is floundering because it needs nourishment and what might that look like?
- What new leaders are there, and what encouragement or equipping do they need to be the leaders God is calling them to be?
- Is God calling you to hold the course, or chart a new direction?

Closing Prayer – feel free to pray in your own words or to use one of the prayers below taken from the ELW

Gracious God, you have called us to varied tasks in the world and in your church. Grant us joy and a spirit of bold trust, that our work would point others to you. Stir up in each of us a willingness to listen for your voice and respond to your call; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips the church with a rich variety of gifts. Grant that we may use them to bear witness to Christ in lives that are built on faith and love. Make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your will, so that we may share with all your church in the joys of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE
Monthly Devotions
September 2019

Author: Pastor Laura Strietelmeier

Prophecy: A Companion Bible Study for Ezekiel 9 – Zechariah 14

1. ASK the group....

What are some words or ideas that come to mind when you hear the word PROPHET? (Space below for answers and ideas)

LISTEN to this definition of prophet: "One who speaks on behalf of God."

Throughout the Bible, God had many things to say to the people of Israel, and often, God used prophets as people through whom to say those things. Prophets were not "fortune tellers" getting messages from beyond, nor were they magicians doing tricks. They were people who were listening for what God had to say. Sometimes, they weren't very excited about it. It's hard to stand out in the crowd and say things others may not want to hear. It was lonely being a prophet, and sometimes dangerous – if the king didn't like your words!

2. THINK about people who speak on behalf of others (examples...managers convey company plans, messages, etc. to employees that they receive from upper management; parents speak on behalf of infants before they can communicate with words; local representatives speak on our community's behalf when we send them to Congress, etc.)

3. ASK the group...Why is it important to have people who speak on behalf of others?

4. LISTEN to this information about prophets: Throughout the Bible, most prophets receive messages from God through visions and dreams. Sometimes they relay the messages through spoken or written words. One example of this is the prophet **Ezekiel**, who told people a vision he had about a valley of dry bones. In his vision, God used Ezekiel to call out to the bones, and they came together into human form, grew flesh and, with the winds of the world blown into their nostrils, began to breathe again. This story represented God's plan to revive the people of Israel, who had been defeated by another country and taken away from their homes. Sometimes prophets relay the messages through actions, called "sign acts." One example of this is the book of **Hosea** – in which Hosea marries a woman who has been a prostitute, symbolizing God's all-forgiving love for Israel. Sometimes prophets speak of the future (as Ezekiel does), and other times they speak about the present, pointing out what God wants people to do in the here and now. One example of this is Amos, who lived at a time when there was great wealth in Israel, but also great poverty, and the wealthy were taking



advantage of the poor. Amos warned that God's judgment for this behavior was coming.

5. READ the passages (divide into groups, each read one passage). For each passage, the small group will
 - A. Ezekiel 37:1-14.
 - B. Hosea 1:1-3 and 3:1-5
 - C. Amos 4:1-3 and 5:21-24.
6. SHARE what you read in the passages. What is the problem in the passage? What is God's solution or promise for the people?
7. ASK the group...who are our prophets today? Who speaks on behalf of God for our communities, our world? How can YOU be a prophet for those around you?
8. PRAY together...Thank you, God, for speaking to us in ancient times and today. Teach us to listen for your messages and to share them boldly in your world. Amen.





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE
Monthly Devotions
October 2019

Author: Mr. & Mrs. Scott & Connie Blackford

Luke 14:15-24

In Luke, Jesus is invited to, and attends, a banquet. One of the guests says to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" He uses the statement as an opportunity to share a parable story.

Jesus tells the one who spoke how dinner party invitations had all been sent out in advance by the master of a house. Everyone, those of nearly all social status in town, we invited. As the day of the banquet arrived the master of the house sent his servant to those whom had had invited. It seems unlikely, but all these invited guests found pedestrian excuses to miss this gala event. Upon hearing that all who were invited were not coming, the owner of the house became angry and sent his servant into the streets and back-alleys of the town to invite "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." The servant complied, and they came, but still there was room for more guests in the banquet hall. Next, the master sent the servant into the countryside to "Go out to the roads and county lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full." (verses 22-23). He says those who don't come will "never taste" my banquet.

Jesus came preaching that "the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17), but He was rejected. In this parable, the kingdom of God was prepared as a banquet for the invited guests. Those who ignored the invitation to the banquet missed out. Is the Kingdom where God reigns where we want to be? Or do we follow our own self-centered agenda? Where are our priorities? Who of us has not written a letter expressing "regrets" when not wanting to accept an invitation? Is this after all, different?

Will we be ready to come as we are, invited by Christ? Are our excuses as flimsy as those listed, or have we invented more socially acceptable ones? Do we even find it difficult to believe that God is so generous? God's call to us is urgent. The Banquet, the Kingdom of God here among us, is ready. Are we tasting it?

We are *chosen* to accept His loving invitation. We are reminded in this parable that God's love for us is so wonderful, so great, that he wants us to be saved even more than we want to be saved.

In our Sunday morning worship, we are invited to be in the company of saints and the living God in Word and Sacrament. Christ has opened the door of salvation to everyone. May we never be too busy to come to the banquet, for all is ready!



Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We pray that we might receive the gracious generosity of the Divine Host, You Lord, who threw the doors to the banquet open. Help us to consider how we can accept and embody Your loving welcome that offers the goodness You have extended to us all. Through Your son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen

The Invitation

I'd not considered God so much, although His voice was clear
Caught in the clamor of life, I guess I failed to hear
At first, he called me softly, when life was going well
Then slightly louder as I found myself unsettled for a spell
His voice grew even greater as my own could hardly speak
And rolled out-loud like thunder, when my prayers became weak
He's been with me through times of joy, of loneliness and fear
And showed me very faithfully, that He'd be ever near
He sends an invitation, then, directly to my soul
To come and dine with all His saints, and make His banquet full
I answered, yes, I will be there, in wanting Him to see
Myself, unworthy, grateful though, that He invited me

~Scott Blackford





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE

Monthly Devotions

November 2019

Author: Pastor Brian Haller

This devotion is based on Luke 19-24, John, Acts, Romans, and 1 Corinthians 1-8. This is not a definitive study of these books. Scripture is an inexhaustible resource offering ever new inspiration.

Depending on time available for devotions the leader may choose the one section (below) that seems most appropriate for the congregation. The others may be commended for home study to be completed before the next monthly Council meeting.

Luke 19-24 “...to all nations”

Reflection

Luke's Gospel ends as it began, with good news for all. The Christmas angels announce Jesus' birth as “good news of great joy for all people...” (2:10b). Just before his ascension Jesus tells his disciples “...repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (24:47).

Application

Despite amazing progress, the modern world is threatened by age-old tribalism – division fueled by prejudice and based on race, religion, ethnicity or nationality. Think of those you consider enemies and discuss how you could witness that Jesus is their savior.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to see others as you see them – as your beloved daughters and sons. May we never forget our enemies are loved by you no less than we are. Help us to love those who are different from us, those we fear, and those we struggle to forgive. This we ask through Jesus your son, messiah of Israel and the world. Amen.

John Divine Do-Over

Reflection

Among the ground-rules established before children's games is the infamous “do-over” which gives players the right to start all over again if they don't like the first results. John's Gospel portrays Jesus as the agent of creation, both the first one (“All things came into being through him...” 1:3a) and the new one (“And the Word became flesh and lived among us...” 1:14a).



Application

Can you think of ways Jesus has accomplished a “do-over” in your life and the life of your congregation? Attitudes, beliefs, behaviors that gradually changed in ways you never thought possible. Can you identify things in your life today that cry out for God to “do-over”?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, fix me, please. This I pray through Jesus your son, messiah of Israel and the world. Amen.

Acts “...together with certain women”

Reflection

The radical inclusivity of Jesus’ ministry begun in the Gospel continues in Acts. The disciples apply this principle immediately following Jesus’ ascension: “All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women...”

Application

How does this description of the earliest church demonstrate radical inclusiveness? How can your congregation witness to it today?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant us your Spirit that your church be a community for all people – a community unique in its embrace of people with nothing in common except you. This we pray through Jesus your son, messiah of Israel and the world. Amen.



Reflection

Anticipating a stop-over on his way to Spain St. Paul wrote Romans to introduce himself and his beliefs.

Application

Limiting yourself to what could fit on a post-card, how would you introduce your beliefs?



Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our relationship with you shape our identity. Enable us to express that relationship faithfully attracting others to Jesus. This we pray through your son Jesus, messiah of Israel and the world. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1-8 **Would you join this church?**

Reflection

St. Paul's letters to the Corinthian church were in response to their problems, conflicts and questions. The Corinthians were divided over beliefs, leadership, sexuality, and marriage. They even resorted to secular courts to resolve church disputes. While we might assume there was a "golden age" or "good old days" when the church was conflict free, apparently "church fights" are as old as the church. The issue is not whether there is conflict in the church, but only how it is dealt with.

Application

Can you think of examples of faithful and unfaithful ways to resolve disputes in the church?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, be with us as we struggle to become a community that reflects your love for each of us and all people. Help us to acknowledge our differences mindful that Christ between us is more important than whatever divides us. May the world know we are your disciples by our love, and may that love dominate our commitment to the truth and one another. This we pray through your son Jesus, messiah of Israel and the world. Amen.





2019 YEAR OF SCRIPTURE Monthly Devotions December 2019

Author: Pastor Eric & Deacon Erin Bodenstab

Introduction

Congratulations on making it to December! The Year of Scripture is nearly over. Before we get ahead of ourselves, though, let us remember the end. And by that, we mean THE end—the last vision that John has in Revelation of the end of all things.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:1-5, NRSV)

This is God's certain future. How we live in the meantime is less certain, but God has hopes for us. The letters that we read this month, from 1 Corinthians through Jude, point to things in the early church that were going right and things that were going wrong as the first Christians tried to live into those hopes. Like them, we also get some things right and some things wrong. Fortunately, God keeps promises with or without our help, and forgives our sin, renewing our hopes as we await that final, beautiful vision.

Gifts and Guidance

Depending on time and council size, read and discuss some or all of the following passages as a large group, or break into groups or pairs and report back when you're finished.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 “*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...*”

- Why does God give us these gifts of the Spirit? (See verse 7.)
- How is God's certain future present in this passage?

Read: Galatians 5:16-26 “*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit...*”

- Why, according to this passage, is it so hard to live as a disciple of Jesus? (See verse 17.)
- How is God's certain future present in this passage?

Read: 2 Peter 1:3-11 “*His divine power has given us everything needed...*”

- Does it surprise you that mutual affection and love support godliness? Explain.
- How is God's certain future present in this passage?



Read: 1 John 4:7-21 “Beloved, let us love one another...”

- What makes love perfect, and why does that matter? (See verse 17.)
- How is God's certain future present in this passage?

Remembering God's Future

In Advent, we remember Jesus' first coming and Jesus' second coming, looking back to celebrate God's incarnation and looking forward to the culmination of God's promises. As Christians and as congregations, God calls us to do the same with our own lives and histories—to reflect on how God has been present in our lives and to anticipate Jesus' return. Remembering the past can give us reason to trust God and reason to repent. Remembering the future can motivate us to live into that vision now.

Prayer

Beloved Creator, hasten the day when faith will become sight, and by the Spirit, empower us to live into your future now. Amen.

