

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR AUGUST 2, 2020

Isaiah 55:1-5

- Once again we remind ourselves that these words come to a people in exile. They come to a people who no longer have a nation and no longer have a king. So when they recall the “everlasting covenant” made with King David, what does that mean? Has God abandoned the promise? In response, Isaiah declares that the promise and witness that David bore to the Israelites has now become the promise and witness that the Israelites bear to the nations. The circumstances of God’s promise to Israel in exile encourage us when we find ourselves despairing over what is happening in the world. How might God be telling us that we are being shaped to be the response and witness to our world? What does that mean during this pandemic? What does this mean in the struggle for racial justice?
- All of this message is couched in the language of a feast, a feast we are invited to partake in. Of course, this is not a feast of literal food and drink. God invites us to feast upon God’s presence, upon what really satisfies. How might you feast upon God’s presence and God’s promise?

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21

- These verses are a part of a larger psalm that praises God for all that God has done. The lectionary uses these verses to capture the theme of how God provides to all their needs and desires. Consider the following two verses: “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.” How would you read these verses in light of the first lesson from Isaiah? How would you read these verses in light of the miracle we hear about in the gospel?
- If you were to praise God based on what God has done in your life, what would you say? What would your psalm sound like?

Romans 9:1-5

- Note the change in tone between last week’s lesson and this week’s. Last week we ended with Paul’s enthusiastic pronouncement that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. This week – in the verses that immediately follow that pronouncement – Paul declares his anguish over his own people the Jews. Does their rejection of Jesus mean that God has forgotten the promise to them? More importantly, does their rejection undermine Paul’s pronouncement that indeed nothing will separate us from the love of Christ?
- What follows with this opening anguish is Paul’s argument in Romans 9-11 about what will happen with the Jews. Our lessons only give us the opening of the argument (this week – Romans 9:1-5), the middle of the argument (next week – Romans 10:5-15), and the closing of the argument (two weeks from now – Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32). Paul’s conclusion in Romans 11 is that the rejection of Israel is **partial** – not all have rejected

Jesus (11:1-10), **temporary** – it will happen only until the full number of Gentiles comes in (11:11-27), and **serves a deeper, greater purpose** – the rejection of Israel means the salvation of the Gentiles (11:28-36). In the end, Paul is convinced that all Israel will be saved because it is about God's doing and not ours. In other words, if nothing separates us from the love of Christ, then Israel must be saved in the end!

- When have you questioned whether God's love was only for a certain group? What might Paul's struggle here reveal to you about those questions?

Matthew 14:13-21

- We often forget the context for the feeding of the 5000, found in the opening line of this passage. After hearing about the beheading of John the Baptist, Jesus goes to a deserted place by himself – to grieve? Out of fear? To pray? Regardless of the reason, the needs of the people do not stop, for they come to him. And even when the disciples try to get rid of the people – to give Jesus more space? – Jesus turns and performs one of his best-known miracles. What does this say about how we should respond when grieving or struggling?
- The miracle also speaks to what God can do with the little that we have. The miracle vividly illustrates the parable of the mustard seed from last week: Jesus takes 5 loaves and 2 fish and turns it into a feast for 5000 men – with 12 baskets left over! What do you bring to God to be used? What can God do with your gifts and talents?