

BIBLE STUDY SERIES, Year C
Proper 19-29 (Christ the King)
Parish of the Good Shepherd, Waban

(These question sheets use brackets—[]—to mark verses that were included in the old Lectionary but are not used in the Revised Common Lectionary. You will not hear them on Sunday, but they will add to your understanding.)

Our Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle, constructed around the first three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke. (These are called the “Synoptic Gospels,” as if seen through a common eye.) Each year we read more or less straight through one of these, with variations for special seasons. (The Gospel of John, which transforms history into poetry, is used to heighten times of extraordinary celebration, such as Christmas and Easter.) The new Lectionary year begins on I Advent. This is Year C, and our Gospel is Luke.

The weekly reading from Hebrew Scripture (the “Old Testament”) during the post-Pentecost season usually offers two options. The first respects the integrity of Hebrew Scripture by moving through books sequentially; in Year C, it features Israel’s major prophets. The second option, the one carried over from the previous Lectionary, uses passages chosen to echo or enhance some theme in the Gospel reading, though sometimes it’s a challenge to guess what the editors had in mind!

The “New Testament” reading usually comes from one of the Epistles, and like the Gospel readings it tends to go straight through one book at a time. There is usually no deliberate connection between its contents and the other readings, but it is startling how often they seem made for each other anyway. In special seasons, selected passages from the Book of Acts or Revelation may be used instead.

Proper 19 (repeated from previous set of questions): Sept. 14

Jer 4: 11-12, 22-28

Ps 14

I Tim 1: 12-17

Lk 15: 1-10

Jer 4: 11-12, 22-28

Questions

1. Often Jeremiah’s voice proclaims God’s anger at Israel and warns of punishment to follow. But what attitude is in God’s words this time? For what reason? How is this future different from what God would do?

2. What is the condition of God's people according to God, in v. 22? Can one not know how to do good? How, then, would one learn?
3. What results of God's judgment does Jeremiah prophesy in vss. 23-26? How does God sum up the impending doom? Do you see any room for hope in God's words?

I Tim 1: 12-17

For your information

I Timothy is one of the "pastoral letters," written under Paul's name but with some major differences in style and content. This practice would have been accepted as a way for a loyal disciple to use Paul's authority in addressing problems in the small churches. The picture given here of his former life is more starkly stated than in his own letters, though it is similar to that in Acts 9: 1.

Verse 15 is used in the BCP, as part of the assurance of pardon. (See BCP, p. 332.)

Questions

1. We often hear, "Ignorance [of the law] is no excuse," but [Paul] says here that he acted out of ignorance, in unbelief, and therefore received mercy. Do you think that's an excuse? Give examples from your own life, or those of others you've seen. What would Jesus say about this? Are we now beyond the reach of mercy, because we know and still go wrong? Or does real understanding always result in obedience?
2. According to the author, what use has God made of Paul's conversion? Do you agree that the conversion of such an apparently hopeless case has this effect? Have you seen examples?

Luke 15: 1-10

For your information

Tax collectors were particular objects of contempt for observant Jews, because they were Jews who served the hated Romans, gathering money from the people of Israel to serve the pagan Empire and its emperor who claimed to be a god. This in-between role made them obviously "unclean"; of course it also allowed proper Jews to follow the law but avoid contamination. Because of the ritual importance of meals, one did not invite such people to one's table. That is why so many stories about Jesus' focus on meals and the people he welcomed to the table. This setting focuses what Luke sees as the central issue between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes: is anyone to be excluded from the feast?

Questions

1. What is the implication of the fact that "all the tax collectors and sinners" were coming to hear Jesus? Why exactly would the Pharisees and scribes grumble?
2. How would you characterize the behavior of the man in the first parable, the woman in the second, and the father in the story of the prodigal son which immediately follows? Would you behave the same way in similar circumstances? Would most sensible people do so? Why, or why not?
3. What then is the point about the nature of God as illustrated in these three stories? Why do you think that in every case others are invited to join in the rejoicing? Who do you think will accept the invitation, and who will refuse it?
4. What are the implications of this question for one's ability to take part in the heavenly banquet? How exactly do we accept or refuse that invitation, in our present lives and for eternity?

Proper 20: Sept. 21

Jer 8: 18-9 :1

Ps 79: 1-9

I Tim 2: 1-7

Lk 16: 1-13

Jer 8: 18-9 :1

For your information

The northern region of Gilead produces a resin from the Styrax tree which was popular as a soothing medicine.

Questions

1. Here Jeremiah continues his lament over his people. What does he see as their plight? How does he feel about it? Who is speaking in v. 19b? v. 20a?
2. What does this passage tell us about the relationship between a prophet—or at least, this prophet—and the people to whom he proclaims dire warnings? Does it seem to be like that of God to humankind?

I Timothy 2: 1-7

For your information

The author of this letter is worried about the problem of false teaching in the young Church. One strain of developing Christianity held that the body was an impediment to holiness, and saw sexual expression as a temptation to be resisted. (Cf. I Tim 4: 3-5.)

Questions

1. What prescription is given for prayer in v. 2, and for what purpose? Why do you think the writer puts this first? Would Jesus have said the same? Do you think that vs. 3-4 do in fact lead logically to this advice?
2. The prescribed reading ends with v. 8, but that's the middle of a sentence. Keep on reading, to the end of the chapter. What do you make of the content? How does it fit with vs. 1-8? Why do you think it's not included in our lectionary?

Luke 16: 1-13

For your information

This parable immediately follows the ones about finding what is lost. It is a fine example of something that Jesus almost certainly said, because it is so surprising if not outrageous! If you have trouble with it, you are not alone.

The Greek word used for the bringing of charges suggests that they may have been slander, rather than truth. The word often translated “shrewdly” can mean “prudently,” without moral connotations.

Absentee landlords were usually not beloved figures. They often charged enormous interest on loans, so that in this case the total sums owed may be twice the value of the original loan.

Questions

1. Pay careful attention to your own reactions as you read this story, taking it line by line. Do you think the rich man here is a stand-in for God, as is often true, or if not, what does he represent? Is the manager really irresponsible, as alleged? dishonest? How would you describe his character? What surprises you? puzzles you? offends you? delights you? What is going on here? Does the explanation above about high interest rates help, or not?
2. What do you make of v. 8? Why does the master commend the manager? What does this reasoning have to do with us?
3. Can you connect vs. 10-13 with what precedes them, or do you see some sort of editor's error in this passage?

Proper 21: Sept. 28

Jer 32: 1-3a, 6-15

Ps 91: 1-6, 14-16

I Tim 6: 6-19 (and read 1-5)

Luke 16: 19-31

Jer 32: 1-3a, 6-15

For your information

As Jerusalem is about to fall to the Babylonians, Jeremiah has made himself unpopular at court by prophesying the downfall and capture of Israel's leaders, including the king.

Questions

1. What sort of prophet is this, whose message from God has to do with real estate? What is the symbolic importance of Jeremiah's owning this land? What does it have to do with God's promises to Israel?

I Tim 6: 6-19 (and read 1-5)

Questions

1 What does the author mean by "contentment"? What does it have to do with godliness? What can one gain from godliness, if it's combined with contentment? What if it's not? What particular kind of discontent is the author's target here? Do you agree with v. 10?

2. What "good confession" do you think Jesus made in his testimony before Pilate? What is "the commandment" which we are to keep until Christ's coming?

3. What is the responsibility of the rich, as described here? Do you think Jesus would say the same?

Luke 16: 19-31

For your information

The presence of Abraham in this story emphasizes the continuity between Israel's faith and ours..

Abraham speaks for justice as understood by "Moses and the prophets." All Jews considered themselves to be "children of Abraham," and therefore participants in God's promises made to him.

Again we have a deeply troubling story--and again, it's in the shadow of Jerusalem. The basic outline of this story is familiar in Jewish tradition, but it always has a happy ending, not the harsh one that Jesus gives it here.

Questions

1. What seem to be the offenses of the rich man, for which he is sent to Hades? Is being rich itself a grave sin? Is Lazarus' suffering alone the reason for his being with Abraham? (The Greek words suggest that he is reclining beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet.)
2. How does Abraham respond to the rich man's pleas for mercy--first for himself, then for his brothers? What do you think of these responses? Do they sound like what Jesus himself would say--did say, to those who appealed to him? Do you agree with Abraham's statement in v. 31? Can you hear a double entendre in it--and if so, what might be its purpose?
3. Why do you think the editor of this Gospel has put this story near the end of the journey? Can you see any sort of deliberate progression over the past few weeks?

If you have time

--Compare this reading with the three parables in Lk 15, and also Lk 17: 3-4, which is not included in the lectionary. Are they contradictory, or is there some way to reconcile them?

Proper 22: Oct. 5

Lamentations 1: 1-6

Ps 137 (or Lam 3: 19-26, as a canticle)

or Habakkuk: 1-4, 2: 1-4 (and read 1: 5-17)

II Tim 1: 1-14

Luke 17: 5-10

Lamentations 1: 1-6

For your information

The psalms that make up the book of Lamentations are full of grief over the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Jerusalem was the spiritual center of Israel; it contained the Temple, the core of religious life, where Jews were expected to come as pilgrims and to make ritual sacrifice for sin. This defeat marked the beginning of the Babylonian exile for Israel's leaders, and pressed the question of what it could mean that God was always on Israel's side.

Questions

1. What images does the writer choose to describe Israel (Judah)'s distress? How do they fit his purpose?
2. Whose suffering does the writer underscore, in particular? Why?
3. Can you think of cities in recent history that might fit this description? New York, after 9/11? Berlin? Can whole cities suffer in this organic way?

Habakkuk 1: 1-4, 2: 1-4 (and read 1: 5-17)

For your information

The short book of Habakkuk is named for a prophet who lived while Babylonia was at the height of its power, at the end of the 7th century BCE. But it falls into three distinctly different parts, and was probably assembled from disparate materials around the theme of "theodicy"--explaining the ways of God toward humankind.

Questions

1. According to the prophet, who will be God's agents in bringing judgment upon Israel? Do they seem like the sort of agents God would choose?
2. What does it mean that the Chaldeans' "justice and dignity proceed from themselves"? that "their own might is their God"? How would you apply these words in our present day?
3. What is the prophet's complaint against God in 1: 12-13? Do you sometimes experience God that way? What does the prophet do with his complaint in 2: 1? How does God respond? What does this tell us about what to do with our own quarrels with God?

II Timothy 1: 1-5 (6-14)

For your information

Like I Timothy, this letter contains advice for a struggling congregation about how to keep on living faithfully during a time when one's faith can bring suffering. It is the most personal of the so-called pastoral letters, and may be at least partly by Paul himself. Timothy became a Christian before he met Paul.

Questions

1. According to Paul, what seems to be the necessary relationship between a missionary's powers and his "ordination" by an apostle such as Paul (v. 6)? Do you think that baptism serves that purpose for us?
2. What is Paul's advice to Timothy and others like him, and what does he offer as assurances to support their work? How much of this applies to us? Do we suffer for the gospel too?

Luke 17: 5-10

Questions

1. Does the apostles' request to Jesus, "Increase our faith," sound like something they would really say? Have you ever made the same request to God, or Jesus, or anyone else? Can anyone increase somebody else's faith, and if so, how?
2. Jesus' immediate response does not try to do what they ask at all. Is there a reason for that? Does the rest of the reading speak to their request?
3. What are the implicit answers to Jesus' questions in vss. 7-9? Would you answer the same way? If not, why? Why do you think Jesus uses this example? What is his point in v. 10? How does it affect you?
4. What connection do you see between this reading and the one from Habakkuk?

If you have time

--Consider the collect that is assigned for Proper 19, in the BCP.

Proper 23: Oct. 12

Jer 29: 1, 4-7

Ps 66: 1-11

II Tim 2: [3-7] 8-15

Lk 17: 11-19

Jer 29: 1, 4-7

For your information

The prophet Jeremiah seems to have been consistent in attacking wishful thinking. After years of telling Israel's royalty what they did not want to hear, and watching his prophecies come true, he set about shattering false hope of a quick and easy return to the Jewish homeland.

Questions

1. What are the specifics of Jeremiah's advice to his people in exile? Why? Do you admire this attitude, or do you find it discouraging or cynical?
2. How do you understand v. 7b: "...in its welfare you will find your welfare"? How could this be true? Another translation says "peace" instead of "welfare;" are they the same thing? What sort of "peace" would this be?
3. What does this advice have to do with us, in our present situation?

II Tim 2: [3-7] 8-15

For your information

Here is more of the writer's advice to a small Christian community. Verses 11-13 are rhythmic, and fall naturally into what seems to be a hymn form, perhaps one used in the early churches.

Questions

1. What is the point of the analogies in 2: 4-6? What do they say to us?
2. The theme of imprisonment vs. freedom appears often in Pauline letters; Paul himself was often imprisoned. How is that image used here? What examples can you give out of your own experience?
3. What is the meaning of "...he cannot deny himself" (v. 13)? How would you illustrate this point, as it applies to Christ Jesus? Can we "deny ourselves" in this sense?
4. What specific problem in the church community is implied in v. 14? Does it apply to today's church?

Luke 17: 11-19

For your information

Again we are reminded that this journey will end in Jerusalem. The region of Samaria lay between Galilee (Jesus' home, and so far the location of most of his ministry) and Jerusalem. The origin of Jewish contempt for "Samaritans" is unclear. One story says that the original Jewish inhabitants of

Samaria went into exile, and were then replaced by foreigners whose religion was a distortion of Judaism. The other says that the exiles returned to their home, but were led to set up a shrine to God that was not in Jerusalem, and therefore, to Jews, heretical and unclean.

Lepers were required to stay far from "whole" people. Leviticus 13: 2-3 made priests the arbiters of whether or not people were ritually clean.

Questions

1. Do you find any special significance in the timing of the lepers' healing--after they have left Jesus, before they reach the priests?
2. Why does only one of them turn back? What difference does it make that he is a "foreigner"? To what does Jesus attribute his healing?
3. What connection do you find between this story and the first reading? How does it fit into the sequence of stories as we approach Jerusalem?

If you have time

--One learned commentator points out that this passage is packed with information, that it addresses four different theological themes:

Christological: Who is Jesus? What does it mean for him to be the messiah?

soteriological: How are we saved? How is Jesus our savior?

eschatological: What will the "end time" be like? How is the present related to it?

parenetic: How are we to live our present lives?

How do you think this reading addresses these questions?

Proper 24: Oct. 19

Jer 31: 27-34

Ps 119: 97-104

II Tim 3: 14-4: 5

Lk 18: 1-8

Jer 31: 27-34

For your information

Hebrew Scripture traces the history of God's covenant with Israel, as it changes over time and is shaped by circumstances; but it always rests on the promise that God will not abandon Israel.

Questions

1. What is the nature of this “new covenant” that God announces through Jeremiah? Can you recall previous versions of the covenant, and what they share with this one?
2. What is radically different about God’s promised new relationship with Israel, as seen first in v. 30 and then in the nature of the covenant described in vss. 33-34? How does this new understanding apply to us? To your experience?

--Read the entire, dramatic (and somewhat scandalous) story of Jacob as a young man, beginning with ch. 27. Here is one of Israel's patriarchs. What do you think of God's choosing him? If you know the entire story of King David, can you see any similarities?

II Timothy 3: 14-4: 5

For your information

Not surprisingly, the young churches were constantly beset by "false teachers." Of course this was long before official Christian doctrine had been established by a series of councils, and one day's doctrines might be the next day's heresies.

Questions

1. What is the writer's advice in the face of false doctrine? How is it possible to tell what is false and what is true? What "sacred writings" are meant in 3:15, and how are they to be used? Do you use Scripture that way?
2. Does 4: 3-4 apply to our time? What does it mean to have "itching ears"? Do we tend to choose teachers who suit our desires?

Luke 18: 1-8

For your information

This is one of many passages in Luke about prayer. The "Lord's Prayer" appears in ch. 11, in a version somewhat different from Matthew's. You might keep track of other examples, and see how they build on one another.

As noted above, a widow who had no male protector was all but helpless in Jesus' culture. Since she was entirely dependent on others for charity, ordinarily she would have to be very careful not to offend those in power.

Questions

1. In v. 1, we are told what this parable is about. Do you think this description fits what follows?
2. How is the judge characterized? Given the fact that the authority figure in a parable usually represents God in some way, do you think this judge has anything in common with God?
3. How would you describe the widow's character? Why does she prevail? Does she have anything in common with any of Jesus' other featured characters? With Jacob, in the passage from Genesis? What do you think we're intended to learn from this parable?
4. V. 8b was not included in the previous lectionary. What does it add to the context of the story?

If you have time

--Read Lk 17: 22-37. Do you see a connection between it and this parable?

Proper 25: Oct. 26

Joel 2: 23-32

Ps 65

II Tim 4: 6-8, 16-18

Luke 18: 9-14

Joel 2: 23-32

For your information

Joel seems to have been a prophet during the period just after Cyrus the Persian had ended Israel's Babylonian exile. Unlike many earlier prophets, apparently he was accepted as a prophet even by the priests within the Temple.

Questions

1. How does Joel express the joyful new life that God has given Israel? In our times of abundance, would a prophet use the same images to express God's gifts—or others?
2. What does v. 25 suggest about the cause of the exile? Do you believe that God works this way?

II Tim 4: 6-8, 16-18

Questions

1. On the basis of these passages, how does Paul seem to understand his present situation? What sort of "rescue" do you think he expects from God?
2. Paul's words reflect great confidence that he will receive "the crown of righteousness." Does this strike you as an arrogant claim? On what basis do you think it is made?

If you have time

--Read 4: 9-15 for a taste of how Paul hands on authority to his successors. What picture do you get of how his mind works?

Luke 18: 9-14

For your information

As noted before, Pharisees were highly regarded scholars of Scripture and protectors of Israel's tradition. Tax collectors were scorned, as Jews who did the Romans' dirty work by collecting taxes for the emperor.

The word translated "rogue" (NRSV) in v. 11 means "without righteousness."

Questions

1. How does the Pharisee demonstrate that he is "not like other people"? Isn't it appropriate for him to give thanks to God that he is virtuous? Do you take comfort in your own virtuous behavior? Do you think it is ever OK to feel that some people are better than others?
2. How is the tax collector contrasted with the Pharisee? Why is he justified? Isn't it better not to sin in the first place than to have to ask forgiveness?
3. What connection do you see between this passage and the one from Joel? In the passage from II Timothy, does Paul's confidence sound to you like the Pharisee's here?

****All Saints' Day (see note below)**

Daniel 7: 1-3, 15-18

Ephesians 1: 11-23

Luke 6: 20-31

Daniel 7: 1-3, 15-18

For your information

This first year of King Belshazzar was 554 BCE. The four great beasts that came out of the sea represent the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, and Antiochus Epiphanes.

Questions

1. What is the reassurance given to Daniel and to Israel through this terrifying vision? Why is this reading used for All Saints' Day?

Ephesians 1: 11-23

For your information

The letter to the Ephesians represents a well developed, and therefore late, understanding of the meaning of the Crucifixion and Resurrection and a celebration of the community formed around them. It contains fragments from some of Paul's letters, but was probably composed by someone else.

Questions

1. Taking the passage line by line, recall where you have heard these themes and images before as Paul worked them out in letters to his churches. What is the inheritance promised to Christians? How was it obtained? What is the writer's prayer for the Ephesians? What does it mean to have "the eyes of [our] hearts enlightened"?

2. According to this passage, what is Christ's position now? What is his power? What is his relationship to creation? to the Church?

3. Recall the tension in Paul between what has happened "already" and what is "not yet." Where does this passage fall on that spectrum? Why do you think it is appointed for All Saints' Day?

Lk 6: 20-31

For your information

The Beatitudes appear only in Matthew and Luke. Luke has Jesus standing on a level place (a plain), surrounded by multitudes, and speaking while looking up at the disciples. Matthew has him and his disciples leaving the crowd behind, and climbing a mountain for a more private teaching.

In Jesus' culture, people lost standing for many reasons, not just economic poverty but sickness, deformity, widowhood, behavior contrary to the rules, and so on.

[We saw the version from Matthew this year on Epiphany IV. Why do you think it is also appointed for All Saints' Day?]

Questions

1. Compare Matthew's and Luke's versions of the Beatitudes. Do you see any significance in the different "stagings" of this event? What other differences do you see?
2. What do you think is Jesus' purpose in addressing the crowds this way? What do these categories of people have in common?

[Traditionally, the Sunday following All Saints' Day (Nov. 1) uses the readings for All Saints' Day instead of those that would follow in sequence. In order to preserve the sequence of readings through the Pentecost season, the lessons and questions that follow are those regularly assigned for those Sundays, but they will sometimes not be the ones you will hear in church.]

Proper 26: Nov. 2

Habakkuk 1: 1-4, (5-17); 2: 1-4

Ps 119: 137-144

II Thess 1: 1-4, (5-10) 11-12

Lk 19: 1-10

Habakkuk 1: 1-4, 2: 1-4

For your information

The short book of Habakkuk is named for a prophet who lived while Babylonia was at the height of its power, at the end of the 7th century BCE. But it falls into three distinctly different parts, and was probably assembled from disparate materials around the theme of "theodicy"--explaining the ways of God toward humankind, especially with regard to suffering and evil.

Questions

1. According to the prophet, who will be God's agents in bringing judgment upon Israel? Do they seem like the sort of agents God would choose?
2. What does it mean that the Chaldeans' "justice and dignity proceed from themselves"? that "their own might is their God"? How would you apply these words in our present day?
3. What is the prophet's complaint against God in 1: 12-13? Do you sometimes experience God that way? What does the prophet do with his complaint in 2: 1? How does God respond? What does this tell us about what to do with our own quarrels with God?

II Thessalonians 1: 1-4 (5-10) 11-12

For your information

Both I and II Thessalonians deal with the coming fulfillment of God's promise in Christ, and with what to do in the meantime. These are probably early letters, written at a time when the expectations of Christ's imminent return were wearing thin and it was beginning to seem that it might be a long wait. There is some evidence that II Thessalonians was written by one of Paul's disciples.

Questions

1. According to Paul, what is happening in the Thessalonian community? What purpose does it serve to suffer persecution for Christ's sake? Do you think he's right?
2. What consequences does Paul promise for those who cause Christians harm? Is there any indication of how soon these events will happen?

Luke 19: 1-10

For your information

Jericho is only 15 miles from Jerusalem, a day's walk. It was on a major trade route, so that taxes (in this case, customs) involved a lot of money. Zacchaeus was therefore especially despised, for collecting taxes from Jews that would go to the Roman emperor.

The name "Zacchaeus" means "clean."

Questions

1. What do you think Zacchaeus' initial behavior shows about him? Why do you think Jesus picks him out? What is his response? Why? Have you ever been picked out that way? If so, how did it affect you?
2. What do those in the crowd think of Jesus' choice? Where have you seen this response before? How does this incident prepare us for the coming events in Jerusalem?
3. What other stories in this Gospel are brought to mind by v. 10? Why might the editor choose to remind us of them now? How might the reading from Isaiah be connected to this theme?

Proper 27: Nov. 9

Haggai 1: 15b-2: 9

Ps 145: 1-5, 18-22 or 98

II Thessalonians 2: 13-3: 5

Luke 20: 27-38

Haggai 1: 15b-2: 9

For your information

The prophet Haggai was apparently the major figure who inspired Israel's sluggish leaders to get busy rebuilding the Temple after their return from exile, in 515 BCE. It was a central symbol of Israel's recovery, a renewed religious focus.

Questions

1. Again we are given the time and context in great detail. Is this information important? Can you think of other passages in which the same sort of very specific context is given?
2. To whom is the prophet instructed to speak? What is their situation? What possible hope can Haggai offer them? What does God have to do with it? Does this have anything to do with us?
3. Does this passage speak to the darkening season before the end of the Church year?

II Thessalonians 2: 13-3: 5

For your information

This section continues to give the Thessalonians encouragement for the in-between time.

Questions

1. Paul assures the Thessalonians that God chose them as "the first fruits for salvation." According to him, how did this come about? Does God still seem to choose certain people that way?

Luke 20: 27(28-33) 34-38 (Read vs. 39-40 too.)

For your information

Jesus is now in Jerusalem, teaching in the Temple. This was the special territory of the Sadducees, an elite many of whom were priests.

The Sadducees refer to a custom called "levirate marriage," which called for a widow to marry her dead husband's brother so as to carry on his line.

As v. 40 indicates, this is the last in a series of questions put to Jesus by those who are unnerved or threatened by him. They will now pursue him in other ways.

Questions

1. Since the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, why did they ask Jesus a question about the resurrection?
2. How does Jesus answer them? What is the difference between "this age" and "that age"? What might it mean that to God "all of them are alive"?
3. Why do the scribes tell him that he has "spoken well"? Do they mean it? Why do they not dare to ask him another question?
4. Does this picture of heaven--nobody married to anybody--appeal to you? Why, or why not?
5. What does Jesus use as evidence that the dead are raised? Does his argument convince you?

Proper 28: Nov. 16

Isaiah 65: 17-25

Canticle 9 (Is 12: 2-6)

II Thessalonians 3: 6-13

Luke 21: 5-19

Isaiah 65: 17-25

Questions

1. What will be the nature of the "new heavens and a new earth" that God is promising to Israel? What "former things" will be replaced, and how? Can they really be forgotten, as God says? Can you recall passages in Isaiah and other prophets which described them?
2. How would you describe the sequence of prophecies that we have read over the weeks leading up to this end of the church year? How does this famous passage—especially its last verses—serve as a culmination to "salvation history" as it is told in Hebrew Scripture? How does it prepare us for next week, "Christ the King," and for Advent?

II Thessalonians [2:13-3: 5] 3: 6-13 (and read vv. 14-15)

For your information

There is some uncertainty about the authorship of this letter, but generally it is thought to be one of the earliest Pauline letters, written soon after I Thessalonians. Its language is strong, sometimes a passionate warning against misunderstanding Christ's promise and failing to stand guard against the forces of evil and deception.

The word which is usually translated "idle" also implies "disorderly," so as to get in the way of those who are focused and disciplined.

Questions

1. Here is the last piece of advice to the Thessalonians before the letter ends. How would you describe its tone and content? What apparent problems in the community does it address, and why do you think Paul and his followers considered them of such importance? How does this advice apply to us?
2. Previously, Paul has sometimes seemed to suggest that "believers" are God's chosen, assured of salvation. Is that true in this passage? Why are some of them to be reproved (v. 15)?
3. How does this passage show the writer as a teacher, trying to help brand new Christians understand what it means exactly to love one another? Are you surprised by the particular concerns he chooses, or do you see them as obvious examples of what the Gospel requires in practice?
4. How does the writer understand the connection between evangelist and role model? Do you think about yourself that way?
5. "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat." This line has been used for political purposes. What does it mean to you, in context? Would Jesus agree?

Luke 21: 5-19

For your information

In 69-70 CE, Jerusalem and its temple were indeed destroyed by the Romans. Most Jews tried to defend their city, and many were killed; most of the rest scattered, and set up a new center in Jamnia. But many Jewish Christians fled, believing that Christ, not Jerusalem, was now their center. This difference magnified the tension between Christian and non-Christian Jews into a fundamental split.

Here is another example of Christian eschatology, a vision of the end-time.

Questions

1. This passage is immediately preceded by the story of the widow who gives her coins to the temple treasury. Does it have anything to do with what follows?
2. What is the importance of Jesus' predicting the temple's destruction first? What are the other signs of the coming end-time? Can you match the false prophets described in vss. 7-8 with more contemporary figures?
3. According to Jesus, who/what are the people and institutions his followers can no longer rely on? Why will they be particularly affected by each of these betrayals? Is there anything left that they can rely on?
4. Why do you think they are told not to prepare their testimony in advance? Is this good advice? Have you ever followed it? Is it the way defendants are usually instructed?
5. Many of Jesus' followers were in fact killed during the fall of Jerusalem. So how are we to understand v. 18? What might be the hope/opportunity offered in this destruction?
6. How is this passage related to the other lessons for today?

Proper 29: Last Pentecost, Christ the King: Nov. 23

Jer 23: 1-6

Canticle 4 or 16 (Lk 1: 68-79, the Song of Zechariah)

or Ps 46

Colossians 1: 11-20

Lk 23: 33-43

Jeremiah 23: 1-6

For your information

Jeremiah speaks for God in pronouncing woe upon Israel's rulers, who should have been faithful shepherds but have instead created the conditions for invasion and exile.

The prophets have long said that Israel's messiah will be a branch of the tree of Jesse, David's father.

Questions

1. What image of the expected messiah is presented here? To what extent does it match your image of Jesus?

Colossians 1: 11-20

For your information

Colossae is a town in Asia Minor. Its church was probably not founded by Paul, and though it seemed in general to follow Paul's principles, like many others it was threatened by teachers from other spiritual traditions.

Questions

1. Here is another messianic image. How is it like the one in Jeremiah? How is it different? What explicit meaning has been made by now out of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?

2. A constant tension in Paul's letters is between the "already"--how things have changed because of the crucifixion and resurrection--and the "not yet," the fulfillment or ultimate reward, which is still to come or to hope and long and struggle for. Usually Paul balances between. Where does this writer seem to fall on that spectrum?

Luke 23: 33-43

For your information

Suddenly, after two triumphant readings, we have come to Golgotha after all. The former Lectionary offered Lk 19: 29-38, Jesus' glorious entry into Jerusalem with the crowd cheering, as an alternative. Why do you think it was removed? Would you prefer it to this reading?

Questions

1. What sort of king is this? How does he show his kingliness? Is he in any sense a ruler in this scene? Or are you uneasy with the concept of Jesus as king, in the light of such passages as Lk 18: 19.