

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR SEPTEMBER 8, 2024

Isaiah 35:4-7a

- This passage invites us to re-consider what “vengeance” means. When God comes with vengeance, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap, the speechless sing, streams spring from the desert. How do you associate these descriptions with “vengeance”?
- *As God is, so we are called to be.* As we reflect on God whose vengeance brings justice and transforms the world, we ask ourselves how we might do the same. How do we channel our anger into action?

Psalm 146

- While we may be quick to agree with the psalm’s call to not put “trust in rulers,” look at how we are called to follow God in who God is, for God is the one
 - Who gives justice to those who are oppressed
 - Who gives food to those who hunger
 - Who sets the captive free
 - Who opens the eyes of the blind
 - Who lifts up those who are bowed down
 - Who cares for the stranger
 - Who sustains the orphan and the widow

In other words, *as God is, so we are called to be.* How are we doing as individuals, as a church, as a nation, in following this God?

James 2:1-17

- On the one hand, the passage says that we should not play favorites, for it goes against the love of neighbor that is called the “royal law.” On the other hand, the passage speaks about God’s option for the poor. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. The rich oppress the poor. The rich “blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you.” How well does the present church pay attention to God’s preference for the poor? What can we do to encourage ourselves to act differently?
- “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty” – James changes how we think about judgment. We are judged by the “law” of liberty. We are judged according to grace and mercy. “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Do we approach people more out of judgment or out of mercy?
- James 2:14, 17 are at the heart of Luther’s quarrel with the book of James, because it went against Luther’s understanding that we are saved by grace through faith, which is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Do you agree with Luther’s assessment? Why or why not?
- Even though it is used as an illustration of faith without works as being dead, 2:15-16 presents the biggest challenge to the church and how we are called to reach out to others.

Mark 7:24-37

- Though we may try to explain his reaction away, Jesus treats this foreigner, this Gentile, dismissively, calling her a *dog*! How do you understand this reaction?
- Despite this initial rejection, the woman is undeterred. She changes Jesus’ mind by her argument and her persistence. She reminds me of Jacob wrestling with the man of God in Genesis 32 who finally says to the man, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” (Genesis 32:26). What do these two characters (Jacob and the Syrophenician woman) say about how we should be with God?
- Have you ever tried to picture the healing that Jesus performs with the deaf man? How odd would it look? Has God ever worked in strange ways with you?