

Lectionary Devotional Guide



*TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BERWYN, PENNSYLVANIA*

OCTOBER 6 – NOVEMBER 8, 2008



19th ANNUAL TRINITY CRAFT FAIR
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2008 9:30 AM TO 3 PM

For nineteen years the women of Trinity have held a Craft Fair the second Saturday in October to raise money for mission outreach and Trinity projects.

♥ **Country Kitchen** - Jule Penry, Denise Shoemaker, and Barbara Webster will once again head this committee and would like your contributions of baked goods, jams or specialty items. This booth sells out every year.

♥ **Silent Auction** – Leppy Horn is collecting treasures for this popular event. Search for something to donate (valued at \$10 or more) from you attic or basement and drop off at the church office.

Silent Auction- Donations needed. Please keep in mind the Craft Fair Silent Auction room when cleaning out closets in the coming weeks. We are accepting any new or gently used glassware, decorative items, linens, antiques that can be easily carried home by one person.

Special Quilter's Corner- Also, if you have any quilter friends, please pass the word that we will have a special "Quilter's Corner" of fabrics for sale and small quilts for bidding on, all kindness of Herb Fry.

Any questions, please call Leppy 610-647-2424.

♥ **Outside Crafters** – Judy Koch has lined up over 35 outside crafters and artisans who will bring their jewelry, woodcrafts, ladies' tote bags, pottery, seasonal items and much, much more.

♥ **Luncheon** – Patty Roseberry and Margi Morgart will head the group who form the Luncheon Committee. Many hands are needed to help serve lunch and beverages to the shoppers who enjoy this time to rest and socialize. Sign up for hourly shifts.

Most important of all, be sure to mark your calendar and tell your friends and neighbors about our wonderful Craft Fair.



LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

October 6 – 11, 2008

“Tell me, whose side are you standing on? I'm standing on the Lord's side. Whose side are you standing on? Standing on the Lord's side.” This old VBS song sounds fresh these days. Ours is a culture of taking sides, and we are constantly being challenged to take a stand. Are you for Obama or McCain? Our faith claims that there is one right side: God's side. We are challenged to pause and examine being on God's side, what it means to be on God's side.

Monday, October 6: Exodus 32: 1 – 14

We have two scenes playing out here. Moses is at the top of Mount Sinai concluding forty days and forty nights receiving instructions from God. The other story is the Israelites are at the base of the mountain becoming restless, having begun to doubt that Moses will ever return. They want visible, tangible figures that will lead them through the desert. Aaron surprisingly complies with this request. The people hand over all of their gold jewelry to Aaron who uses it to cast a golden calf. The people seem to be satisfied with this, and they begin celebrating early the next day.

On top of the mountain, God tells Moses to "go down at once," a clue that the people have really messed up. God states that the Israelites "have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it". God then outlines God's plans to destroy the people and start all over again, fresh, with Moses.

Tuesday, October 7: Exodus 32: 1- 14

This is a defining moment in Moses' life. Should he choose God's side and become the founder of a new nation or should he side with the Israelites? It seems to be a simple decision. Moses has done what God has asked, leading the people out of slavery, helping to establish a new covenant in the wilderness. The people, on the other hand, haven't fared as well. God's thunder and Moses' voice are still echoing in their ears and they turn to Aaron to request new gods. Whose side are you standing on, Moses?

Moses sides with the people. Moses argues a case before God to save the Israelites. "O Lord," he says, "why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?" The reason for God's anger is clear to Moses. The people are worshiping idols and turned their back on God. In this rhetorical question, Moses makes a different point: the people of Israel are not his people but God's people. It was not Moses but God who brought them up out of Egypt. Moses is not going to let God off the hook easily here, not allowing God to shove God's chosen people aside the first time they get into trouble.

Wednesday, October 8: Exodus 32: 1 – 14

Now that Moses has refocused the conversation to examine God's role rather than the people's sin, he becomes even bolder, asking, "Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?'" In other words, "Think about your international reputation, God. After seeing your Red Sea escape route, do you want the Egyptians to say you're crazy?"

Moses reaches the conclusion of his argument and does the unthinkable. He makes demands of God! He tells God to turn from his anger; to change his mind about destroying the Israelites; and to remember the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac and Israel. This story provides powerful guidelines for taking sides with the people, especially those who have no other defenders. Justice and love go together.

Thursday, October 9: Philippians 4: 1 – 9

Faithfulness – that is the challenge to all God's people. The name Syzygus means "yoke fellow." In the early church, the yoke became a symbol of cooperation. The two are yoked together when the urban dwellers support the missionaries who in turn travel to spread the gospel. Paul has entered into this kind of relationship with the Philippians and reminds them of it when he addresses them as "genuine yokefellow." He includes Euodia and Syntyche in his apostolic status; they are worthy of the same financial support he has received. He highlights their status as leaders. Paul's focus is their need to reach a common mind, to work together faithfully.

Friday, October 10: Matthew 22: 1 – 14

Some say that there is no "practical" lesson from this parable. There are no nuggets of wisdom to be "applied" to a congregation. What do you think?

Saturday, October 11: Matthew 22: 1 – 14

As with Moses and the golden image of God, this passage has two story lines – the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of God's people. The theme of judgment is balanced against the fact that the wedding banquet does occur. The king does not let a minor rebellion interfere with his love for the Son and his hospitality toward his subjects. Can we hear ourselves as both recipients of God's judgment and as the undeserving objects of God's hospitality? We are on both sides.

"For many are called, but few are chosen."

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

October 13 – 18 , 2008

Monday, October 13: Matthew 22: 15 – 22

In Chapters 21 & 22 of Matthew, representatives from a number of Jewish leadership groups come to Jesus with questions: questions about his authority; questions about the resurrection; and questions about the Law. The question for this week is brought by disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, an unlikely team. The Herodians represent the interests of Herod and other clients of Rome within his circle. Yet representatives of both groups come in order to "trap" Jesus by providing him with a lose/lose situation. But first they smooth the way by speaking of Jesus' integrity, commitment to truth and equity, and lack of concern for the opinions of others.

Tuesday, October 14: Matthew 22: 15 – 22

Their question is short and to the point: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" The tax referred to is the census tax, a per person tax. The problem for Jesus is this: If he answers yes, then he could be seen as in collusion with Rome, justifying Roman occupation and oppression of the Jews. This would not be a popular answer among the Jewish people. On the other hand, if Jesus answers no, he could be suspected of revolutionary sentiment against Rome.

Jesus answers and shows that he is aware of their trickery. He calls them "hypocrites," because they show something on the outside (flattery) that is quite opposite of what is true internally. Jesus calls for a coin, specially made to pay this tax, and he asks them to identify whose image is on the coin. When they identify the emperor's face and title, Jesus delivers an amazing and rather ambiguous one-liner: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

Wednesday, October 15: Matthew 22: 15 – 22

What are we to make of this statement? The first clause on its own indicates that the tax should be paid, since the emperor's image and inscription on the coin would cause it to fall under "things that are the emperor's." On the other hand, the final clause places a question mark on what belongs to whom? Given Jesus' repeated use of the Scripture throughout Matthew and his preaching of the arrival of God's kingdom, Jesus would see nothing falling outside of "the things that are God's."

The beauty of Jesus' answer is that he acknowledges payment of the census tax and at the same time subverts the reach of the emperor. Jesus' answer could be read simply as an affirmation of Christian submission to governing authorities. Yet if read from another angle, Jesus affirms God's ownership of everything and downplays imperial

claims of power. The coin which Jesus called his questioners to produce read "Tiberius Caesar, August Son of the Divine Augustus" on one side and "Pontifex Maximus" (high priest) on the other. In the midst of such claims, Jesus reasserts God's ownership and rule.

Thursday, October 16: Matthew 22: 15 – 22

How is it that we might hear the meaning of this story in our context? What are the claims of power that Jesus would challenge for his people today? This story raises fundamental issues of allegiance. If God owns all, then we belong to God alone. Yet we live with powers and influences competing to own us, to capture our hearts. What we have does exert ownership on us ("you cannot serve both money and God"). We need to guard against consumerism and materialism as competing allegiances to our loyalty to God.

In the end, the questioners of Jesus go away amazed. May we also be amazed by a Jesus not easily categorized, a Jesus wise in his answers to testing, a Jesus whose first allegiance is to the all-encompassing reign of God.

Friday, October 17: Psalm 99

The psalm combines two different aspects of our faith: the claim of God's cosmic sovereignty and the celebration of God's faithfulness to God's people. How are the two parts connected? The Lord's continuing commitment to justice and righteousness fill both creation and history. God intends that the resources of life should be made everywhere available to everyone who has need. God's passion for fairly distributed goods to sustain life is expressed as "justice," "equity," and "righteousness." "Holy is he!" The Lord is beyond challenge, beyond resistance, beyond explanation. God's purpose will indeed be worked out in the earth; none can hinder it.

Saturday, October 18: Psalm 99

Israel's three great intercessors, Moses and Aaron and Samuel, gave voice to the needs of the people and their deep hope. They are voices of petition in relation to Israel's experience of oppression because there was no other help for its time of terrible need. These petitions are the context for the great affirmation of the psalm: the Lord answers! The Lord heard, attended, was moved to care, acted. The Lord has antennae for people who are in desperate need of the justice God loves.

*"Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity;
you have executed justice and righteousness . . ."*

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
October 20 – 25, 2008

Monday, October 20: Deuteronomy 34: 1 – 12

Not many today have the chance to die a good death. But, in this week's reading from Deuteronomy, Moses was given that gift. Dying a good death did not mean whitewashing Moses' life, though, or pretending that he was perfect. After all, he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his temper in expelling water from the rock in the wilderness. Dying a good death in Deuteronomy meant celebrating Moses' very humanity, his leadership and commitment to his community, and his relationship with God, which was striking in its intimacy.

Tuesday, October 21: Deuteronomy 34: 1 – 12

When Moses finally is ready to listen to God's instruction to go up the mountain, he takes one last opportunity to speak to his community, offering a rich and beautiful blessing for them. Some of Moses' best qualities shine through as he offers a very positive, hopeful prayer. Instead of using his last very last words to warn or inspire guilt, Moses praises both God and the people.

Our leaders are remembered in many different ways. In this passage, Moses is remembered as a prophet. He was in fact much more. He was a lawgiver, a teacher, a philosopher, a general, a king, a sage, a high priest, and an interpreter.

Wednesday, October 22: 1 Thessalonians 2: 1 – 8

This passage from Paul's letter reveals something of his leadership role among God's people. Paul has written of the reception the Thessalonians gave to him, and now he turns to his own work with them. Paul is working out his understanding of what it means to be called "apostles of Christ." First, leaders must be willing to speak boldly. The concept of "bold speech" was used in antiquity to indicate freedom of speech and courage to speak in the face of opposition. It is used with political connotations of not allowing civic authorities to stop protests, or not allowing the mob to prevent the proclamation of what is right.

Paul's expression draws upon the tradition of a type of speech which is characteristic of ancient philosophers, particularly the Stoics and, even more so, the Cynics. The Cynics ("dogs") were so named because they acted like mongrels, harassing the people. Like the Cynics, Paul was not afraid to go against the cultural norms of his day. Although what Paul declared was unpopular, he declared it boldly. Leaders need to speak boldly and "tell it like it is." Often the easier route is to avoid conflict and allow

things to carry on as always. To be fearless in speaking out against immoral behavior and the abuse of power will lead to an environment of true community.

Thursday, October 23: 1 Thessalonians 2: 1 – 8

A second aspect of Paul's leadership is personal integrity. Paul begins by listing what was not characteristic of his preaching, suggesting that God has "approved" him and his coworkers. God's testing is a frequent theme in the Bible. Through the testing of the heart God determines the fitness of leaders. The Roman context is one of political office where a candidate for a civic position was tested as to whether he was fit to serve the people. He was not to possess character flaws such as deceitfulness, crookedness, selfishness, and the like. It was a moral aptitude test. What do we expect of our leaders in government and in church?

Friday, October 24: Matthew 22: 34 – 46

The two stories in this passage bring to an end a section focused on the Jerusalem leadership in confrontation with Jesus' leadership. The confrontations begin with the Jewish chief priests and elders questioning Jesus' authority. After questions brought to Jesus by Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, a lawyer from the Pharisees asks a final question: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

Jesus' answer fits well with his teaching on the Law throughout the gospel of Matthew. Jesus demonstrated that right interpretation of Scripture must view all God's commands through the lens of the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. We should not be surprised by Jesus' quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 as the greatest of commands upon which "all the law and the prophets" hang.

Saturday, October 25: Matthew 22: 34 – 46

Some popular images of Jesus emphasize Jesus as one who "breaks the rules." Yet Matthew goes to lengths to show Jesus as one who not only rightly interprets Scripture but as one who commands obedience to even its finest points! Jesus' critique of the Pharisees is not their desire to keep the law in its smallest detail but their tendency to fall short on obedience to its central values.

The teachings of the Scripture, the Torah, is rightly understood when it is read through the lens of love for God and love for neighbor. Love for God and love for others is the greatest of challenges. The breadth of these two commands makes obedience to them a lifelong effort.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . "

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
October 27– November 1, 2008

Monday, October 27: Psalm 107

How do we relate to human authorities in light of God's authority? There are times when we wish that we had to deal only with God and could avoid the pressure of living with other people. Relationships and decisions are often confusing and power struggles are unavoidable. At other times, the idea of God being a reference point for human relationships and community issues seems an unnecessary intrusion. What business is this of God's?

No simplistic answers are offered. Human decisions, relationships, communities must be rooted in the reality of God. This is expressed by the psalmist: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever." The Lord's grace and power makes possible the life of the redeemed, both personally and in community.

Tuesday, October 28: Joshua 3: 7 – 17

The goal of so many years in the wilderness has at last been realized. God, who called Israel out of Egypt so long ago, has kept the divine promises!

The story goes out of its way to point to the spring floods as the time of this miraculous crossing by referring to the harvest which occurs at the conclusion of the rains. Not only would the waters be unusually high at this time of year, but the location near Jericho would be significant. All the force of the flowing river now bears down on the mouth of the Jordan and on the path that the tribes are to take. The story makes it clear that the people did not enter the Land of Promise because they were able to skip over a trickle, but because the Lord held back a torrent!

Wednesday, October 29: Matthew 23: 1 – 12

Matthew's gospel story sneaks up on us. Over and over again we usually assume the story is talking about other people, people in Jesus' day who were an obstacle to the reign of God or whose lives are inconsistent with their words. Then with a word or a phrase we are jerked awake to find our own names being called. Matthew 23 seems like a tirade by Jesus against the scribes and Pharisees for a whole list of failures, and then the narrator in vs. 8 turns to speak directly to the readers. We discover that the behavior of the scribes and Pharisees is only an illustration, that the real point of the text is not a condemnation of the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Instead, the text is aimed at Christian readers, who can no longer remain detached from the story, wondering why Jesus and the religious authorities had such a squabble.

Thursday, October 30: Matthew 23: 1 – 12

What's the issue? Christian leaders are not to act like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, but to be servants, to be humbly learning from their one instructor, Jesus. At the same time, the church should not fall into the habit of using titles for leaders, but instead to "do whatever they teach you and follow it." How do the scribes and Pharisees serve as negative models? They do not practice what they teach. Their lives give no evidence that they take seriously the law about which they endlessly debate. Consistency and wholeness are missing in the living out of their teaching.

Greatness is manifest in service, and in the economy of God the humble, those who maintained integrity in life and avoid showiness in leadership, will finally be exalted. The church is confronted with the demand for a righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees, with a style of leadership and following that acknowledges one divine source of authority. Teachers as well as learners are instructed by Jesus himself, the authentic interpreter of the law, and teachers as well as learners are called to do the will of the heavenly Father.

Friday, October 31: 1 Thessalonians 2: 9 – 20

Paul writes not simply to preserve a record of his experience or to reflect on it for himself. His recollections carry within them a call to the Thessalonians to continue in the faith to which they have been called. Much as a teacher or parent uses praise for positive reinforcement, Paul uses memories of his visit with the Thessalonians to introduce issues about which he has some instruction to offer. The relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians allows Paul to assert a powerful claim over their behavior. How can they act in ways that contradict the gospel if they are Paul's own "crown of boasting"?

Saturday, November 1: 1 Thessalonians 2: 9 – 20

Drawing on the familiar language of 2:1 – 8, Paul compares the apostles to fathers, who treat each of their children with care, "urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God." Despite this appeal to the relationship between the apostles and the Christians at Thessalonica, it is essential that the gospel be understood as God's word rather than a human word. What the Thessalonians received was not simply a relationship with Paul and his colleagues, but the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord's grace and power makes possible the life of the redeemed, both personally and in community.

*"Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the steadfast love of the Lord."*

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
November 3 – 8, 2008

Monday, November 3: Joshua 24: 1 – 25

The lectionary leaves out most of the historical story, but we need these verses to understand why Joshua concludes that the gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt offer no credible alternative to serving the Lord. While the Lord tells what he did for our ancestors way back when, the pronouns "you" and "your" dominate. Joshua's audience is considered the direct recipient of the Lord's kindness.

We too acknowledge what the Lord has done in previous generations or in previous decades of our lives. Land, towns, vineyards, and gardens are not something achieved by Israel; they all are God's generous gift. All that we are and have is finally God's alone, and ours only in trust. Our faith is based not only on what God has done for us lately, but on his track record, beginning with Israel and continuing throughout the history of the church.

Tuesday, November 4: Joshua 24: 1 – 25

The people meet Joshua's challenge by insisting that they will indeed serve the Lord. Joshua then challenges the people to be witnesses against themselves, to be self-critical, and to confess their sins. Just as they would accuse the violator of any agreement to which they were witnesses, so they must examine themselves to see whether in fact they fear, love, and trust the Lord above everything else. So must they, so must we.

Is God always first in our lives? Do we not in fact often serve other gods, by what we do or what we do not do? Evil deeds have bad consequences and we should not put God to the test or take God's forgiveness for granted. Yet the God known to us in Jesus Christ comes to us with words of forgiveness, seventy times or seventy times seven times. God loves and forgives us with the hope and expectation that such love will lead to renewal in our lives, leading to growth in faith and to faith active in love.

Wednesday, November 5: Psalm 78

Psalm 78 urges obedience to God's commands, and warns of the consequences that follow from disobedience. The history of Israel is recited to bind the new generation to the commands of the Lord as the condition of well-being. The instruction is intended to ground members of the community in the conviction that they are part of a responsible covenant community. The psalmist knows that explicit instruction is necessary. Children do not inhale or receive by osmosis the full identity of this community, but depend on the intentional witness of adults. The psalm aims at incorporating the young into the identity of this faith community.

Thursday, November 6: Matthew 25: 1 – 13

The fairy tale ending we all hope for does not happen in this parable. In fact, many of the parables contradict our hopes, our expectations, even our values. But they also contradict our deep-seated fears and insecurities. How much easier it would be to preach these parables if the Bridegroom was more generous and inviting.

The young women were all waiting for the bridegroom. They all belonged to the same community, the same group of friends. They all fall asleep waiting for him to come. Within the community, it is impossible to tell who has enough oil in their lamps, who has been more faithful. This is not for us to judge. The church is a mixed community. What is it to know the bridegroom? What is it to recognize the one called "Lord?"

Friday, November 7: Matthew 25: 1 – 13

The cry "Lord, Lord," takes us back to earlier chapters of Matthew. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (7:21). The lamps recall other words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (5:16).

Living or waiting with enough oil in our lamps suggests that it is the spirit of the beatitudes that characterizes those who recognize the bridegroom, the Lord. This spirit is the spirit of the cross that disrupts all of our categories, all of our judgmental attitudes. The life into which the beatitudes invite us is a life not centered on our works, not on our faith, but on the cross and how God is glorified through our lives.

Saturday, November 8: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 – 18

The images are apocalyptic and it is important to remember that the primary function was comfort and encouragement in times of distress or persecution. What happens next is not the tribulation of those left behind, but the union of those who have died with those who mourn their passing. This unity is underscored by the term "*hama*" which means "at the same time" or "together" and the preposition "*syn*" ("with"), "together with them" (4:17). The use of "*syn*" here recalls verse 14, "God will bring with him those who have died," and will be used again at the end of the verse, "and so we will be with the Lord forever." All will be "snatched up" toward a meeting with the Lord in the air. Paul offers this extraordinary vision of consolation to the community of faith as an expression of hope.

"We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord."