

Bible Study
Proper 4, Year C
May 29, 2016

[RCL] 1 Kings 18:20-21, (22-29), 30-39, Psalm 96, Galatians 1:1-12, Luke 7:1-10

1 Kings 18:20-21, (22-29), 30-39

“When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God.” 1 Kings 18:39

Elijah’s challenge to the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel is one of the most vivid and memorable stories in the Hebrew Scriptures. Two weeks after Pentecost, this story reminds us of the associations of fire with God throughout the Bible. Like the tongues of flame that descended on the disciples in Jerusalem, this miracle takes place in front of a gathering of all the people. After the prophets of Baal are unable to get a response, Elijah calls the people close to him and repairs the altar. He reminds the people who they are by using twelve stones to represent the tribes of Israel. Next, he prepares the bonfire and asks for it to be doused with water three times, an ostentatious act during a major draught. Then Elijah calls on the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Fire descends from the Lord and burns the offering, the people witness this mighty act, believe, and proclaim: “the Lord indeed is God”!

- When has God roused you from a spiritual stupor through a wild prophet or colorful character?
- Have you ever been part of a large gathering where God’s love burned in your collective hearts?
- In this story, the Israelites are called back to their God, whom we believe is one God. How do you read this story, living today in an interconnected world where our neighbors belong to many faiths and religions?

Psalm 96

This psalm of celebration calls us to “sing a new song” and “tell it out among the nations.” All the peoples rejoice with “all the whole earth,” including the sea, field, trees, and heavens. Verse eight is a familiar Offertory Sentence from the Book of Common Prayer, “Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; bring offerings and come into his courts.” We bless God in thanksgiving for being part of this beautiful, holy, and new creation!

- How has your life been blessed by God so that you want to “proclaim the good news of his salvation” and declare his wonders?
- How is coming into God’s courts and worshipping in the beauty of holiness related to the joy of the natural, created world?
- How do you understand God’s providence that “sets in order all things both in heaven and earth,” in the words of today’s Collect?

Galatians 1:1-12

Some letters attributed to Paul are contested, but the letter to Galatians is undisputedly written by the real Paul. In the opening of this letter, he is angry that others have come to this community and told them that Christians must still follow the Mosaic laws, calling anyone who perverts the gospel of Christ accursed (or *anathema*). Paul is ultimately concerned with spreading the Gospel

of our “Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age.” The revelation that Paul received and his beautiful and brilliant letter to the Galatians proclaim a radical vision of Christian freedom and a Gospel of grace and peace for all people.

- Is there a time you have spoken out with righteous indignation for a greater good?
- Paul the apostle received the Gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ and we in turn have received it from him. How do you understand the Bible, written by human authors, as the inspired Word of God that still speaks to us today?

Luke 7:1-10

Is he worthy? The first part of this story goes back and forth on this question. The centurion who has heard about Jesus’s ability to heal is a gentile, but the Jewish elders earnestly appeal on his behalf, praising his generosity. The centurion himself sends friends to tell Jesus that he is not worthy to have Jesus enter his home, but requests that Jesus “only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.” Jesus is not concerned with whether he is worthy but praises his faith in God’s power over illness and death. Even without being physically present, the crowd witnesses Jesus’ authority and power to heal.

- When have you experienced healing through prayer and Jesus’ love?
- This story is about the slave of a centurion, “whom he valued highly.” Share your thoughts about the differences and similarities between slavery in the ancient world, in America, and the modern-day slavery.

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