

THE DEEPEST YEARNING
WEEK ONE: COME, FOLLOW ME

OPENING PRAYER: O God, you created the heavens and the earth and call us to share in your creation. You have wondrously created us as persons who need you and who need each other, even as Jesus needed human communities for nurture, love and support. Make us more deeply aware of our need for one another; accept us for who we are and who we have the potential to become. Help us to accept and love one another just as you have loved us through Jesus. Make us instruments of your peace and agents of your grace, in the name of Jesus, the head of the Church and the cornerstone of our faith. Amen

STUDY TIME

All the Scriptures we will need for this week can be found at the end of this study on separate pages.

1. Read GENESIS 1: 26-27 GENESIS 2:7-9, 18-24

MATTHEW 4: 18-21 JOHN 17: 1-26

- a) is there a common theme to all these passages?
- b) what do they say to you about the need and nature of community?

2. Read LUKE 24:13-49 and ACTS 1: 4-8, 12-17, 21-26

- a) what, according to these passages, is the purpose of a community?
- b) in order to be a Christian community, what needs to be done first?

3. Read ACTS 2: 1-12, 42-47 and ACTS 15: 1-23

- a) what happened at Pentecost?
- b) what was missing which made Pentecost necessary in the mind of God?
- c) what were the marks of the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem according to these passages?
- d) why was the Council in Jerusalem necessary and what were the results?
- e) why is the Council seen as a turning-point in the life of the Church?

4. As you reflect on what you've read today, here are a few questions to think about:

- a) what are the signs of Christian community at Holy Trinity?
- b) what can be done to make these more visible, more powerful?
- c) how open are we to those whose opinions and views are different from ours in our fellowship?
- d) how do we deal with conflict among ourselves?

e) how do we show our support for one another at HTM?

5. Try to summarize what you have learned today and keep the thoughts to share with the rest of the community in our final session.

6. CLOSING PRAYER: Thanks be to you my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given us; for all the pain and insults you have borne for us. Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day, now and for evermore. Amen (Prayer of Richard of Chichester)

7. READING FOR NEXT WEEK: PLEASE READ THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS (it is the first Epistle found right after the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament)

NOTES FOR SESSION ONE

1. GENESIS 1: 26-27 (A, B) GENESIS 2:4-7 (C,D, E, F)

A) God creates humankind in his own image and calls his creation to share in the stewardship of the natural order – we in a sense become the helpmates of God in honouring creation and living in harmony with the created order.

B) God creates humankind I think for another reason, one which is so beautifully described in a poem called The Creation by James Weldon Johnson. Johnson, one of the finest Afro-American poets (indeed one of the finest poets of all distinctions!), speaks of a powerful motivator for God. While not wishing to destroy the beauty of the poem, here are a few “snippets” from it which will give us Johnson’s *raison d’etre* for God doing what God “dood”:

And God stepped on on space,
And he looked around and said,
“I’m lonely -
I’ll make me a world”...

(Johnson then wonderfully describes the creation process that God goes through until....

The God walked around,
and God looked around
On all that he had made.

He looked at his sun,
and he looked at his moon,
and he looked at his little stars;
he looked on his world
With all its living things,
And God said, "I'm lonely still."
Then God sat down -
On the side of a hill where he could think;
By a deep wide river, he sat down;
With his head in his hands
God thought and thought,
Til he thought: I'll make me a man!
Up from the bed of the river,
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled him down;
And there the Great God Almighty
Who it the sun and fixed it in the sky
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This Great God,
like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Til he shaped it in his own image.
Then into it he blew the breath of life
And man became a living soul.
Amen Amen

(from GOD'S TROMBONE by James Weldon Johnson Penguin Books 1986)

I've always loved the idea that even God gets lonely and desperately wants to be in conversation and in relationship with us!

C) God says, "It is not good for a person to be alone" and thus wills that we are social beings, needing the presence of fellowship sisters and brothers to be whole and fulfilled

D) A community can be as few as two persons – the size of the fellowship is less important than the "soul" which breathes among those called into community.

E) Where God is, there is community; where community is, there is God.

F) Community is where we are helpmates to one another

2. MATTHEW 4:18-21 (A,B, C) JOHN 17: 1-26 (D,E.F, G, H)

A) Jesus calls Andrew and Peter, James and John and the others to form the nucleus of new family around him after he has left his home in Nazareth to begin his itinerant ministry of wandering. He did not need to do this, but ated a community with which he could live and be alive and whole – this becomes very evident when his best friend Lazarus dies and Jesus wants to go to Lazarus’ funeral for two reasons: to be with Mary and Martha and also to be a part of a community in grief for one whom they all loved.

B) the disciples are told what they will become – fishers of the world – but were not told what that would involve. The community of fishers was formed so that the individuals would have a support network, a sounding board, a hiding place when the disciples were sent into the world.

C) the disciples freely went with Jesus, trusting in him for some reason. They trusted that he would take care of them and would give them the tools they would need when they were launched into the world as bearers of the gospel good news. This is a foundation-stone of a Christian community – to trust that God will the community to exist and that the Lord will watch over its every breath and movement. From this community will come all the skills and supports needed when the time is ripe and right.

D) The John passage occurs towards the end of Jesus earthly life and ministry. It is part of what scholars call Jesus’ Final Discourse. This passage is Jesus in conversation with his Father about the community which has been formed around Jesus and around the Word. One of the powerful messages here is that community is part of the will of God!

E) Jesus earlier said, “I am the Vine, you are the Branches” to this community in let them know that they are his sisters and brothers and that they are collectively children of God. The same soil and nutrients which feed the vine also feed the branches and community raised in such rich soil will bear much fruit.

F) through faith in Jesus, the community no longer is a collection of persons who blindly stumble through the world, but is now a fellowship that has been given a clear mandate – to go, be the Church in the world and be Invitators of the Most High. Jesus chose the fellowship, not the other way around and he chose it for a purpose – to carry forth his Father’s mandate given to His Son to be light and hope to a dark and fear-filled creation.

G) to be in community is not easy – it demands much of us and a willingness to sacrifice the ego for the good of the community BUT Jesus promised the presence and the support of the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit to see us through.

H) the work of the community is to WITNESS TO AND FOR THE LORD!

3. LUKE 24: 28-49 (A, B, C, D, E,F) ACTS 1:4-8, 12-17, 21-26 (G, H)

A) a community must live in the possibility of being changed and renewed while “on the road”

B) one question that I’ve always had about Cleopas and his companion – why did they leave Jerusalem when they had been told by Mary that Jesus was alive and on the move?

C) this may be where the idea that “when two are three gather in my name, I am in the midst of them” arose : Cleopas / Companion/ Jesus

D) are the hearts of our Christian communities burning when we gather around the Word and the sacraments?

E) Jesus offers the fellowship the gift of SHALOM which is more than “feeling good” towards one another,. It is the deep commitment of person to person and the desire of each person for the complete joy and wholeness of the other with whom we are in communion.

F) Jesus again promises the gift of the Holy Spirit to the fellowship so that the family of God can be strengthened and equipped for the work which God has laid before it.

G) the community is to witness to the power and love of God not only in its “home territory (in our terms parish, diocese or denomination) but to the very ends of the earth.

H) the community is broken by the death of Judas and the circle needs to be made whole again. Matthias is chosen after prayer and is prayed into the leadership. The question is: who chose Matthias?

4. ACTS 2:1-12, 42-47 (A,B,C,D) ACTS 15: 1-23, 31 (E,F,G,H)

A) the Holy Spirit is given as God through Jesus promised that it would come so the community would be empowered for service and ministry – see also John 15:26 and LUKE 24:49

B) Without the Spirit, the community is nothing more than a gathering of like-minded persons holding similar views and aims. With the presence of the Spirit, it is something else!

C) speaking in tongues in this instance does not seem to be what we call GLOSSOLALIA (the ‘language of God’’) necessarily, but is the ability to speak to others in their human language. The apostles are able by the power of the Spirit to speak to individuals out of their experience and to meet them where they are. The Spirit allowed the apostles to “read their audience” and should be a clue for the Church on how we should be reaching out beyond our own circle.

D) the early Church was marked devotion to the teachings of Jesus as remembered by the apostles, worship and prayer together, sharing meals in common, discovering and alleviating the needs of all, being a community of joy, praise, hope and sincerity.

- E) some wished to exclude Gentiles because they did not fit the demographic of the followers in Jerusalem who were almost exclusively Jewish in origin.
- F) the questions the Council had to wrestle with was: who is in or who is out, and who determines the status of those seeking to be a part?
- G) from this moment onwards (after the Council), the Church moved from being an exclusive group to embracing ALL, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin.
- H) membership in the earliest community was a simple declaration – JESUS IS LORD. The rite of baptism developed as the community grew and expanded and was seen as THE act of initiation into the Body of Christ.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES FOR SESSION ONE

GENESIS 1: 26-27

God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all creatures that move along the ground. So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them

GENESIS 2:7-9, 18-23

The Lord God created man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the East in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow in the ground- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of Life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helpmate suitable for him.” Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helpmate was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken from the man and he brought her to Adam. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.”

MATTHEW 4: 18-21

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fisherfolk. “Come, follow me”, Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of the world. At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

JOHN 17:1-26

Jesus looked towards heaven and prayed, “Father, the time has come – glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people so you might give eternal life to all those whom you have given him.

Now this is eternal life- that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of this world. They were yours; you gave them to me and I have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they have accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me. All I have is yours and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one that was doomed to destruction so that Scripture might be fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you [protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth: your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I sent them into the world. For them I sanctified myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone: I pray also for those who will believe through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity so that the

world may know you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you and they know you sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and I myself may be in them.

LUKE 24: 13-49

On that same day two of them were going towards the village of Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other of everything that had happened. As they talked about things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there these days?" "What things?", he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth", they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death and he was crucified. But we had hoped that he was going to be the one who was to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women said, but him they did not see"

He said to them, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have said. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them all that was said in all the Scriptures about him. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he was going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us for it is nearly evening; the day is nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognized in the breaking of the bread. While they were still talking about this, Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they had seen a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you

troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that was written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: the Christ will die and will rise again on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send what my Father has promised but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

ACTS 1:4-8, 12-17, 21-26

On one occasion while he was eating with them, he said, “Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, at this time are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” ... Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went up to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alpheus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers. In those days, Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about one hundred twenty) and said, “Brothers and sisters, Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke about long ago through the mouth of David concerning who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus- he was one of our number and shared our ministry...(then Peter said), “It is written in Scripture, ‘may his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it’ and ‘May another take his place in leadership.’ Therefore, it is necessary it is necessary to choose one who has been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken from us. For one of these must be a witness with us of his resurrection.” So they proposed two men, Joseph called Barnabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this

apostolic ministry which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they drew lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, so he was added to the eleven apostles.

ACTS 2: 1-12, 41-47

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, the sound like the blowing of a mighty wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? How then do each of us hear them in our own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elomites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia; Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” ... Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread together in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

ACTS 15: 1-23, 31

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers and sisters: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the customs taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they were travelling through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told of how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made everyone very happy. When they came to Jerusalem, they were greeted by all the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the

party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. Peter got up and addressed them, “ Sisters and brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fore-bearers have been able to bear? No! We believe that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, just as they are. “ The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up: “Listen. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written, ‘ after this, I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild and I will restore it, that the remnant of people may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who bear my name’ says the Lord who does all these things that have been known for the ages. It is my judgment therefore that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath. ... The people of Antioch read the letter) and were glad for its encouraging message.