

# BIBLE STUDY

Session 4

Theological

*This is the fourth session on Bible Study that will focus in on the distinctly Lutheran theological perspective in Bible Study. As Lutherans we come to our study with certain convictions, insights, and expectations. We expect not only to learn about who God and Christ are, but we expect to hear God and Christ speak to us directly. We expect to hear Law and Gospel, what shows forth Christ,.*

*As we study certain passages, we may hear God's Judgments for the world and us. This is called the law. We experience the law when we are confronted with our sin. This is a necessary step in order for us to hear the gospel: where we hear God's love, grace, and promises for the world and us. We experience the gospel when we are overwhelmed by God's grace.*

*We also study the Bible with the Bible - we let scripture interpret scripture. A panoramic view of the entire Biblical story helps provide balance for the more difficult passages, stories and themes. If we ignore the entire arc of scripture, we run the risk of taking passages so out of context that we reduce the Bible to a collection of moral laws or a holy rule book.*

*We study the Bible in light of the knowledge that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Not by how we feel or what we experience or accomplish. The central message of scripture is both simple and grand. Because of Christ, we are all accepted into the community of God's people because God loves us, forgives us and makes us the church.*

## Opening Activities



### Centering Moment

Light a candle and observe 30 seconds of silence as a reminder of God's presence among us.



### Luke 16:19-31

*"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

*"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'*

*"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*

*"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'*

*“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’*

*“No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’*

*“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”*



In what ways is this story “law and gospel”? (What is convicting and what is comforting about this story?) In what ways does this text point us to Jesus?



### *Opening Prayer:*

Gracious Lord, your word both convicts and comforts. It reveals to us your heart and intention for us in Christ. Help us to hear and internalize this word in our daily lives. Amen.



### *Music (optional)*

Sing or listen to “I Love to Tell the Story”



### *Share*

Share with one another any thoughts from last weeks’ exercises or session.



### *Watch: Bible Study - Theological*



### *Discuss*

- Theological questions refer to questions that help us think about God and our relationship with God. What assumptions and expectations do you tend to bring to scripture?
- Many people often think that “the Gospel” can only be found in the four Gospels of the New Testament - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and that “the Law” is only found in the Old Testament scriptures. How does it reshape your understanding of scripture to recognize that all of scripture - both Old and New Testaments - contain Law and Gospel?



## Group Bible Study - Theological

**Exodus 3:1-15** (Study by Dr. Diane Jacobson, "Opening the Book of Faith")

- What makes a place holy? What happens to Moses, to us, in sacred space?
- Do we hear God's call as a demand or a promise? As law or gospel? Or both? Do we feel inadequate? Empowered? Fearful? Energized? Scared? Upheld? What demands and promises do you hear in this passage?
- What is the relationship between the call of Moses in the text and God's mission to the world as a whole?
- How does this passage, despite being "Old Testament," show forth Christ?
- How is the vocation of the leader (Moses) tied to the vocation of the whole people of God?

The holiness in this text is not simply about some abstract standing on holy ground. It provides a context and a sign. The holy ground is a sign of God's presence, and it provides a context for the holy word to be spoken. Holy ground, sacred space, is where one pauses to find assurance, to give thanks, to worship and to learn - but it is a sending place, not an ending place. From the burning bush Moses looks out to the journey: to feeling before Pharaoh, to crossing the sea, to arriving at the mountains, to the people finally being brought into the Promised Land.

As Lutherans, we define the Word of God in three ways: Jesus, the living Word; Scripture, the written Word; Preaching, the spoken or proclaimed word.

- Where do we hear holy words spoken?
- Why is such hearing and speaking so important?
- How are worship, baptism, or even Bible study "sending places" and not simply "ending places? How is God present in these places?

Moses' call is not his own. He is being called into God's mission to the world. God has seen Israel's suffering in slavery and intends to do something about it. God's character as a God who looks on suffering and is moved to respond, as one who keeps promises and acts to save, points us towards God's ultimate incarnation, death and resurrection in Christ. Moses cannot alter God's character nor God's promise of freedom, but Moses can take up his call to become part of God's promise in action.

Being holy and being called are not private matters. Being made holy is not the equivalent of being more "spiritual." Moses' experience at the burning bush is not a private, spiritual cleansing. Seeing the miraculous creates space for hearing the call. Hearing then leads to action. The holy word given on holy ground is a vocational word, inviting us to take up our various calls in God's world and for God's world. This vocation calling is relational, invitational, and has outward purpose and direction. The word was not just for Moses; it was for Israel. And not just for Israel, but for the world.

The call of God is particular and personal. In the case of the burning bush, the word was particular to the context of Israel's enslavement and to the narrative of Moses' role within that context. The word is not an abstract, unchanging word given for all time. This is good news for us. This means that each encounter with the divine is new and personal with its own mission and content. We are not Moses, but our calling is also inescapably tied to God's mission in the world.

- To what mission are you called? To what mission is your congregation or institution called? How can this happen?

Finally God's call to Moses is rooted in the promise of God's continuing presence. This promise is dynamic, rather than static; it is particular rather than abstract. God promises to be present with us even to the end of the ages. The Exodus encounter Moses and God comes in the form of a flame. Like God's promise of continuing presence, this flame is available at all times. One encounters the flame when reading scripture,

when gathering in community, when struggling with vocational direction. But be careful: fire can burn. Our encounters with God will not always be only comforting or inviting. We will all have objections and feelings of inadequacy or sin. In fact, that is how law functions--to reveal our sin, to show us that we are not whole without God. Fire burns and purifies. The encounter with the divine presence is likely to change our lives forever. But God will be present with us, lighting our way. This is God's gospel promise.

- How is God's word like a flame? How does it function to burn and purify? How can "shedding light" on a subject function in both a positive and negative way?
- As you consider your own "call story," what promise or good news do you hear in this story of Moses and burning bush?



## *Closing Prayer*

Choose a prayer style that you have learned about to close.



## *Exercises To Do At Home*

**Jeremiah 1:4-19** (by Paul Lutz, "Opening the Book of Faith")

- How do these insights help you interpret this passage?
- What similarities could you list between God's calling and sending of Jeremiah and God's calling and sending of you?
- What is law in this text? What is gospel?
- So what? What difference does it make that God spoke and acted in that situation with Jeremiah? What does it have to do with you (us) or say to you (us) today?
- Where do you see Christ?

**John 8:31-36** (by Kathryn Kleinhans, "Opening the Book of Faith.")

John's Gospel was Luther's favorite Gospel because of its strong focus on Christ as God incarnate.

We might think of the medical profession as being an equivalent to the Law/Gospel relationship: diagnoses and prognosis.

- What is the diagnosis of the human condition (and the church) in this text?
- What is the prognosis?
- Jesus' diagnoses the human problem as bondage, not just physical and political bondage, but bondage to sin itself. Given this diagnosis, what's the prognosis? When the Son makes us free and gives us a place in the household, what, concretely, does that look like for Christians and Christian communities today?
- Will those who initially believed in Jesus continue in his word? Or will they run away from the household of faith? What are some of the causes for why some may run away from the faith?
- What does belief look like and how does it bear fruit?
- The Christian calling is to serve the neighbor for Christ's sake. What does this passage suggest we are freed FOR?

**Romans 7:15-25a** (by R. Guy Erwin)

Paul's understanding of "the law" in this passage takes on the form of "the flesh," or how his bodily existence and the way his body governs even his mind. Paul understands that this is not a simple dualism of body vs mind or spirit, but that the two are always intimately connected as we live in and with both at the same time. Thus we both delight in the law of the Lord, while simultaneously despair as we see ourselves captive to sin. "Flesh" and "Spirit" are metaphors for what draw us away from God and toward God respectively. Luther referred to this as being simultaneously saint and sinner. It explains the complexity of human reactions to not only each other but also to God. That sense of being suspended between God and sin.

This is not a comfortable place to be and is frequently why we tend to try and run away from being confronted with "the law" in our lives. Yet, we have no choice. We must confront these competing impulses. Our wills, by themselves, are not enough to break us free from our human limitations no matter how much we may try.

- How does this text help make sense of the notions of "saint and sinner" and "law and gospel"?
- How do these categories help you make sense of your life and your experience of other humans?
- How do these categories help hope up this text to new understandings?