

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*January 13, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Isaiah 43:1-7** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Since Isaiah is such a long book, it is helpful to think of Isaiah as a grand play which is broken down into three major acts. Act One describes the reason for God's punishment that eventually leads to the Babylonian captivity. The first Act ends with Chapter 35 where God promises to bring the people back. Chapters 36 thru 39 is an intermission taken from 2 Kings 18 thru 20. Act Two (Chapters 40 thru 55) assumes that the people have served their time in exile and God is calling them back home. In stark contrast to the voice of judgment in Act One, God calls to his people with compassion. The final Act (Chapters 56 thru 66) is a warning to those who have returned to remember the sins and punishments in Act One so that they will not be repeated. The text today comes from Act Two where God is calling those in exile to return home. No matter where the people find themselves (north, south, east or west) and no matter what obstacles the people may face (water or fire), God will bring them home.

## **Commentary on Acts 8:14-17** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

After Stephen's arrest and death in Chapters 6 and 7, the Gospel begins to move beyond Jerusalem. Philip begins to successfully preach and heal in Samaria, north of Jerusalem. At that time, Samaritans were not considered Gentiles or Jews but rather part of the lost tribe of Israel that had been corrupted by the Gentiles. The extent of this corruption is exemplified in Simon the "Magician". The conversion of Simon and Philip's later conversion of the Ethiopian Jew indicate the first step toward a mission to the Gentiles. The anointing of the Holy Spirit by the apostles Peter and John illustrates that Pentecost is now spreading to all believers. These events will set the stage for Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and Peter's anointing of Cornelius, a Gentile.

## **Commentary on Luke 3:15-22** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The story of Jesus' baptism in Luke differs significantly from the other three Gospels. The Gospel of Mark simply says that Jesus was baptized by John and the Gospel of Matthew has Jesus and John debating if Jesus even needs to be baptized. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist boldly proclaims that Jesus is the "Lamb of God". But in Luke, John is arrested before Jesus' baptism. Some scholars believe that Luke's story of John leaping in the womb replaces this meeting at the Jordan. Other scholars point out that the disciples of John were competing with the disciples of Jesus. One of the claims for John's superiority was the baptism of Jesus by John. Luke removes this claim by simply taking John out of the narrative. John's absence also explains the later request by John in Chapter 7 to ask if Jesus is the Messiah (The John who proclaimed Jesus "the Lamb of God" or the one who humbled himself before Jesus would have already known). Luke is also unique in that God's message that Jesus is the Beloved is in response to prayer and not the baptism.

## **Sermon Summary** (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

What is Baptism? For Matthew, the baptism of Jesus is a ritual cleansing that had to occur according to the Law before Jesus could begin his ministry. For John, the baptism of Jesus is when the light broke out upon the darkness and the mystery of the ages was revealed for behold "the Lamb of God". In Mark, the baptism of Jesus, recorded in only three verses, is like the starting gun to a race. Unlike the other Gospels, Luke has already had Jesus and John meet when Mary visited Elizabeth. Luke has John point to Jesus and then fade into the background as he is taken to jail. With Jesus' baptism, Jesus' ministry officially begins. What better way to begin than with prayer. After Jesus' prays,

it is only then that the Holy Spirit is sent and the voice declares, "This is my son with whom I am well pleased." No matter which version of the baptism you prefer, they all end with the Father claiming Jesus as the beloved son.

In the United Methodist Church, baptism is the outward affirmation that we are all children of God. We are reminded that God loves each of us and that God waits for all who have strayed to come home. Isaiah reminds us that God knows us by name and we are precious. This was a message those in exile needed to hear at the time of Isaiah and it is still a message that needs to be heard. People often forget how precious they are to God. We also forget how precious our neighbor is as well. No matter where we are born or what language we speak, we are all God's children. All we need to do is pray and our Father will answer in His time.

When Peter and John prayed at the temple, a crippled man walked. When they prayed in Samaria and laid their hand on the people, the people received the Holy Spirit. When we pray, do we expect anything to happen? If a child calls for help, will a parent not respond according to the need? Sometimes it seems that God does not answer prayer only later do we find out that the answer we thought we needed would have only made things worse. As children of God, we should never stop talking to God for, when we need it the most, we just might hear, "You are my beloved child and I love you!".