



Building the Beloved Community

Midweek Lenten Suppers, Bible Study and Worship
STUDY GUIDE

Beginning Thursday, March 5, join us for Lenten Bible Study from 5:15 to 7:00 PM. Each session will include a simple supper, brief worship service, study and sharing.

What is the Beloved Community? While the expression did not originate with Martin Luther King, Jr, it has commonly been associated with his vision of a just and equitable world for all humanity. He mentioned that achieving such a community would “require a qualitative change in our souls and a quantitative change in our lives.” (*Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom*, May 4, 1966) Would this achievement constitute heaven on earth, our return to Eden, our human Utopia? How might you envision the Beloved Community where you are as a physical and spiritual reality, and what can Good Shepherd do in helping to reach this reality?

God Saw All that Was Made, and It Was Good

THURSDAY, MARCH 5th - Read Genesis 1:1-3:24

The Genesis accounts of creation convey an impression that God created everything good, yet such creation included the choice to follow or disobey God. And as a result of our disobedience, all life was cursed.

Questions:

- What is your concept of God as Creator?
 - What does it mean that God created all things good?
 - How do you feel about the notion of paradise that cannot tolerate disobedience?
 - Did God overreact?
 - Would your concept of the Beloved Community make room for disobedience?
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Must God Destroy the Righteous with the Wicked?

THURSDAY, MARCH 12th - Read Genesis 18:16-19:29

Abraham, when informed that God might destroy Sodom for its wickedness, asks the Lord, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (Genesis 18:23) He then proceeds to ask if God would destroy the city if there are at least ten righteous inhabitants.

Questions:

- What is the sin of Sodom that incites God’s wrath?
 - Why does Abraham stop at ten; could even one righteous person save the city?
 - Are the “righteous” those who hate but tolerate evil, or actively oppose it?
 - What are the present-day sins that threaten the existence of humanity and the earth?
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Loving God and Neighbor

THURSDAY, MARCH 19th - Read Luke 10:21-37, Romans 2:1-28

The commandments to love God and neighbor are overarching tenets of faith that connect the Old and New testaments, yet throughout the scriptures there are repeated attempts to understand who God is, and who is one’s neighbor. The Parable of the Good Samaritan offers yet another attempt.

Questions:

- What is your understanding of God and neighbor?
- Does your faith tolerate differences of faith and culture as conveyed in the parable?
- Can God’s love abide in and redeem those who do not follow Christ or believe in God?

Recognizing God Among Us

THURSDAY, MARCH 26th · Read Matthew 25:31-46, Acts 4:32-35, 1st John 4:7-12

One of the most challenging aspects of faith in God's presence among us is embracing the conviction that God's power abides among those commonly perceived as the powerless, or "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40). We are conditioned to rely upon and look to those who have the material wealth to set our political, economic, social and, yes, even spiritual agendas. Is it feasible for us to break this firm mold of conditioning and see the hunger and thirst for spiritual nourishment over material wealth as that which defines us?

Questions:

- How might the message of God's realm conveyed in the assigned readings be reflected and achieved in the present-day makeup of our church and local communities?
 - Is what we propose realistic or impractical pie-in-the-sky fantasy?
 - How realistic or impractical is our faith?
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Biblical Visions of the Beloved Community

THURSDAY, APRIL 2nd · Read Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:1-9, Revelations 21:1-27, and compare with John Lennon's song "Imagine."

We began our series of meditations with the biblical concept of God's Beloved Community as a garden paradise where humanity lived in harmony with all creation and its Creator. We close this series with a biblical concept of God's Beloved Community as the multicultural metropolis of Jerusalem, which shall serve as the capital of the worldly reign of God, through God's anointed Messiah. This concept is compared with John Lennon's vision of the Beloved Community as one where heaven and hell no longer exist, where religion has no place, and everyone lives in peace.

Questions:

- How do you feel about these concepts?
 - What is your vision of the Beloved Community?
 - What is the power that sustains it and why?
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