

Planning For Abundance

A Lenten Study

Using the Sunday Lections from the RCL Year B

**Prepared by Members of
The Stewardship Commission
The Diocese of West Virginia**

*To be used in conjunction with
the Weekly Principles of Abundance Handouts*



Suggestions on how to use this Lenten Study

- Each weekly study ends with the same question: Where is the “abundance” in this passage for you? Keep this question in mind as you interact with the perspective to this question brought forward by the author or authors of the various studies.
- Each weekly study contains one or more passages from the Sundays lections (and always includes the Gospel).
- In each weekly study there are COMMENTS followed by QUESTIONS to help the group facilitator.
- The first weekly study opens with a fun ten point review of Noah that can serve as a group ice breaker.
- The final weekly study is really two meditations with questions that serve as a fitting end to a Lenten study.
- Separate “Activities for Children” handouts accompany each weekly study. These handouts offer a teaching for children that can be conducted in another room while the adults are experiencing the weekly study.
- Separate “The Practice of Abundance” handouts accompany each weekly study. Ten minutes should be allocated each week to review the handout.
- Separate activities entitled “Stewardship Wordsearch” for Week 1 and “Silly Stewardship Sentences” for Week 3 are designed to supplement “The Practice of Abundance” handouts.
- Please complete the separate Evaluation Form and send to The Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia, P.O. Box 5400 Charleston, WV 25361.
- For questions or suggestions about future weekly studies, please contact The Rev. William Carl Thomas at williamcarlthomas@gmail.com or 304-550-6841.

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Genesis 9:8-17

8Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. 11I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” 12God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” 17God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Lessons Learned from Noah 's Ark

1. Don't miss the boat.
2. Remember we are all in the same boat.
3. Plan ahead. It was not raining when Noah built the ark.
4. Stay fit. When you are 600 years old someone may ask you to do something really big.
5. Do not listen to critics. Just get on with the job that needs to be done.
6. Build your future on high ground.
7. For safety's sake travel in pairs.
8. Speed is not always an advantage. The snail was on board with the cheetah.
9. When you are stressed out, float a while.
10. Remember the ark was built by amateurs. The Titanic was built by professionals.
11. No matter the storm- when you are on board with God there is always a rainbow waiting.



Mark 1:9-15

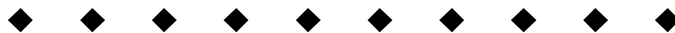
9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."



COMMENT: During this season of Lent the Church joins together to go on retreat for the new life that will be celebrated on Easter. Those anticipating baptism make their final preparations and those already baptized reflect on the meaning of baptism in their own lives. The Church will not only receive new members but the composition and character of the Church will be forever changed due to the blessedness and giftedness of those new members. Whether we anticipate baptism and reception at Easter or have been baptized for a long time, Lent invites us to reflect on our blessedness and renew our commitment to the baptismal covenant.

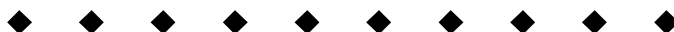
QUESTION: What gifts are entrusted to us and how do we use those gifts?

QUESTON: Do we recognize and celebrate the gifts in our midst?



COMMENT: My friend Gary tells a story of being capsized during a white water rafting trip and being wedged beneath the boat and held under water. He said he was sure he would drown. This event, he said, helped him understand baptism more fully. That event was one of those life-changing events for him. He said he came up out of the waters of the Cheat River a changed man more fully alive and always grateful for the gift of life.

QUESTION: As Christian stewards do we share that zeal, passion and gratitude for God's gifts? Should we have someone hold our heads underwater until we do?



COMMENT: The gospel describes the heavens being ripped apart when Jesus came out of the Jordan River. One gets the feeling that the sky, which had separated humanity from God, was shattered forever. As Jesus ends his public ministry the curtain in the temple was also ripped apart (Mk 15:38). This business of ripping apart, then, seems to

bracket Jesus public ministry.

QUESTION: What are the ideas, actions and beliefs that need to be ripped apart to help us enter more fully into the covenant relationship that the Scripture readings call us to?



COMMENT: The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of his public ministry. This ministry will be a series of steps towards death. This recalls Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous line in *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." This walk towards death is not a morbid journey but rather a series of Jesus handing himself over to the will of God.

QUESTION: What are some of the points where we notice Jesus handing himself over?

QUESTION: What are some of the points in our own lives that we can identify as this handing over process?

QUESTION; What else can we "hand over" to more fully enter the Christian journey?



EXERCISE:

On a scale of one to one hundred how would you relate God's faithfulness in the covenant relationship of baptism in your life?

o _____ 100

God's Faithfulness

On a scale of one to one hundred how would you rate your own faithfulness to God in the covenant relationship of baptism?

o _____ 100

Our own faithfulness

Where would you like to be on your own scale?

o _____ 100

Where I would like to be

What steps need to be taken for this to occur?



QUESTION: Where is the "abundance" in this passage for you?

Lent 2 (B).....The Rev. Canon Donald Vinson

Mark 8:31-38

31Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 34He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

COMMENT: Jesus seeks to prepare his followers for the bewildering sequence of events to come in Jerusalem. We are reminded of his Parable of the Seeds-how, in order to grow and bear abundant fruit, the grains must fall on the ground, die, and split open. The word die sounds terribly final. Resurrection comes only after this frightening, seeming-end.

QUESTION: Why do you think Jesus' disciples were unable to hear the good news of his resurrection as he taught them about what was to unfold in Jerusalem?

QUESTIONS: Can you think of a time in your life when you had trouble looking toward a positive outcome because of the negative experience or possibilities that lay in between? Can you think of a time when the reverse happened-you almost discounted the painful preamble, because you so looked toward the happy outcome? What made the difference?



COMMENT: Peter may think Jesus is going negative and defeatist on them. Perhaps he thinks he is being helpful in verbally "knocking some sense" into Jesus, to get him to focus on the positive and hopeful. We often think that thinking positively can be our bulwark against any tragic outcome, so that we forbid ourselves or loved ones even to consider any other possibility. But Jesus IS thinking positively! He is looking beyond the suffering to the resurrection life that follows it.

QUESTION: Why did Peter rebuke Jesus?

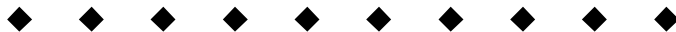
QUESTION: What were his possible motives?



COMMENT: Bringing Jesus' faith into question would be the role of Satan, "the accuser." "You can't count on God to fulfill his promises," is Satan's great theme. (The Temptation comes to mind, as well as The Garden.)

QUESTION: How was Peter playing the role of "Satan" for Jesus?

QUESTION: How might he have been more supportive, and more faithful?



COMMENT: The Cross is a peculiar image for use as ornamentation. It is a cruel instrument of torture, humiliation, and painful death. But it is also Jesus' Victory sign, and ours. When we take it/ ours up, we lift high not the reminder of our own death, but the proclamation of Jesus' victory over our death.

QUESTION: What are some of the layers of meaning the Cross has for you, as a symbol of Christian faith?

QUESTION: How does this Gospel passage challenge us in the setting of priorities for living?

QUESTION: What does Jesus suggest as highest priorities?



COMMENT: It is probably impossible for us to live every moment with the full panorama of eternity in our sight. Jesus reminds the Twelve, and us, that the long range view of eternal joy is far more to be desired than the short term relief of trying to avoid any pain or deprivation. Sometimes short-term inconvenience, frustration, even deprivation can be the surest route to long-term well-being and fulfillment.

QUESTION: When has the path to happiness or personal satisfaction in your life led through some kind of trial or travail first?

QUESTION: When have you had to "die" to one thing in order to "live" into another?

QUESTION: What was that experience like for you?



QUESTION: Where is the "abundance" in this passage for you?

John 2:13-22

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

COMMENT: Jesus knows that corrupt worship always leads to impaired relationship with God.

QUESTION: Why do you think Jesus was upset about the temple being turned into a marketplace?

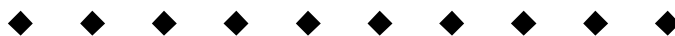
QUESTION: What is the difference for you between excess and abundance?



COMMENT: Sacred space is specifically set aside to come close to God.

QUESTION: What are some of the ways sacred space gives meaning to your worship of God?

QUESTION: How does sacred space serve your Christian faith?



COMMENT: Jesus wants us to have life and to have it to the fullest.

QUESTION: How does this Gospel passage challenge you to use your heavenly Father's house?

QUESTION: What would it look like if you burned with zeal for your Father's house?



COMMENT: Destruction comes before rebuilding - e.g. you want a new bedroom in your house: you have to destroy the old one.

QUESTION: Do you have any private or corporate worships practices that make God's

house less holy?

QUESTION: Can they be removed?



COMMENT: Silver is purified in fire.

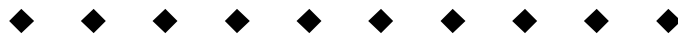
QUESTION: When is it time to clean out God's house and start anew?



COMMENT: The old one to get the new one.

QUESTION: When have you had to remove a personal practice in order to improve another?

QUESTION: What was that experience like for you?



QUESTION: Where is the "abundance" in this passage for you?

Lent 4 (B).....Linda L. Crocker

John 3:14-21

14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

COMMENT: Verse 14 refers to Numbers 21: 4-9. (As the people travelled through the wilderness with Moses they became impatient and began to complain bitterly against God and Moses. God sent venomous snakes to bite the people and many died. The people repented and asked Moses to intercede with God on their behalf and remove the snakes. God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it high. Those who turned and looked at it lived.) Here is a vivid example of the cycle of creation (people living under God's grace), sin (complaints, ingratitude), judgment (death), repentance

acknowledgement of sin) and redemption (a way to be saved). Now Jesus says He must be lifted up in the same way. Looking at the rest of the passage (verses 15-21).

QUESTION: What was the world like that God sent Jesus into - positives, negatives?

QUESTION; How is judgment described?

QUESTION: In what way can people show their repentance?

QUESTION: What is the result?

QUESTION: How is salvation through Jesus different than salvation via bronze snake?



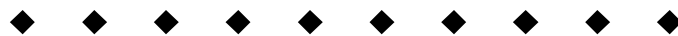
COMMENT: "For God so loved the world..."

QUESTION: What do you love so much? How do you demonstrate it?

QUESTION: Who do you love so much? How do you show it?

QUESTION: How much is God's 'so'? How does God show us?

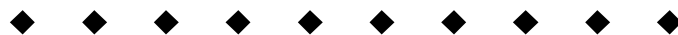
QUESTION: What costs are involved with your 'so's'? What was God's cost?



COMMENT: Both judgment and salvation are revealed as characteristics of God.

QUESTION: Do you see them as opposites or can they be considered as part of a continuum?

QUESTION: Do we have a choice as to which we experience?

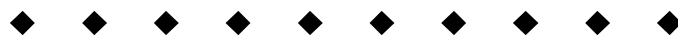


COMMENT: A single candle illuminates.. Many candles provide illumination.

QUESTION: How do you experience the light?

QUESTION: What about darkness?

QUESTION: In the darkness, how do you experience the introduction of light?



COMMENT: "Those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

QUESTION: How do you feel about walking in the light when you think about this verse?

QUESTION: What are some things you could do/change so that you might feel more at home in the light?

QUESTION: What help might you need and where would you look for it?



QUESTION: Where is the "abundance" in this passage for you?

Lent 5 (B).....The Revs. Julie Harris and Adam Thomas

Editor's suggestion: Treat this study as a guided meditation. First become familiar with the three passages of scripture. Then read meditation "A" and discuss the questions. Then read meditation "B" and discuss those questions.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

31The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 5:5-10

5So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; 6as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." 7In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

John 12:20-33

20Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. 27"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28Father, glorify your name." Then a voice

came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

MEDITATION "A"

COMMENT: *Jeremiah 31:31-34*

In today's reading from the prophet Jeremiah, God affirms once again that God will never break a promise God makes. The peoples of Israel and Judah have both broken the covenant, but it is still valid because God is trustworthy. God renews the covenant with the people not despite their lack of trust but because of it. God models for the people one in whom they can trust and hope and have faith. Because of God's faithfulness, the people have an example by which to live their lives. Planning for abundance is all about trust. And God shows again and again the lengths to which God will go to keep God's promises. Because God is faithful, we are able to be, as well.

Also, in the reading from Jeremiah, the prophet proclaims that God will "put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." This is an example of parallelism, which (in the Hebrew Scriptures) serves to intensify the thought expressed. This verse, therefore, is quite important for the theology of Jeremiah's writings. God is not concerned with superficial observation of the law, but with the integration of God's commandments into the very being of the individual. This integration (based on the trust discussed above) helps us weather the storms that we face in our lives. A surface level faith washes away in the first rainstorm, like dirt with no roots to hold it together. Recognizing the faith that God has written on our hearts means acknowledging that God's presence abounds even in the times when it is hardest to perceive. This acknowledgment leads to a mentality of abundance. When we pray with the psalmist to "Create in me a clean heart, O God," we are admitting that too often God's words on our hearts become covered in the grime and sludge of the world.

COMMENT: *Hebrews 5:5-10*

The reading today from the Letter to the Hebrews is a bit scary because of the long, difficult name that appears twice: Melchizedek. But it links very nicely with Jeremiah, so don't let this name frighten you away. The writer of Hebrews quotes extensively from the Hebrew Scriptures to undergird specific points about Jesus' role in salvation history. In this case, the writer reaches all the way back to Genesis 14, in which

Melchizedek (“priest of God Most High”) blesses Abram. This blessing happens directly before God makes the first covenant with Abram, in which God promises Abram descendants as numerous as the stars in heaven. Melchizedek appears again in Psalm 110: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The Letter to the Hebrews (as it does with dozens of passages from Scripture) binds these threads into the tapestry it weaves of Jesus’ role. Melchizedek blesses Abram right before the covenant is made. The Psalm promises an eternal priesthood. Hebrews, then, sees Jesus’ role as “high priest” (one way the letter describes Jesus’ messiah-ship) as an enduring sign of God’s faithfulness in keeping God’s promises. Again, a heart-based knowledge of God’s faithfulness propels us into a mentality of abundance.

QUESTION: What is the best news you heard last week?

QUESTION: What made it so special?

QUESTION: How have you experienced God’s promise (trust, faith) when you have recognized your own sin/vulnerability/dependence on God? When you haven’t?

QUESTION: What do you have “written on your heart?”



MEDITATION “B”

COMMENT: *John 12:20-33*

Continuing the discussion about faith and trust, recall Jesus’ words to Philip and Andrew: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Obviously, the grain of wheat does not literally die, so we ask ourselves what Jesus means by this. Here’s one way to look at it. The grain is buried (like a dead person) in the ground. We no longer see it. We do not know what is happening to it. Quite possibly, we may not even remember where we buried it. Once it “dies,” we have no control over that grain of wheat. But it sure isn’t going to do anything sitting in a bag in the shed, where we do have control over it. Only when we give up our illusory efforts at control, can our seeds bear fruit. When we bury our seeds in the ground, we are trusting (there’s that word again) that God is going to coax those seeds to sprout and push up through the soil and become stalks, bushes, flowers, trees.

The same is true with our lives. One way of describing hating your life (as John puts it) is keeping yourself from being the center of your own life. The Greek word translated “life” here is not *zoe*, which is the normal word for “life.” Instead, it is *psuche* (whence comes “psychology”), a more intense word that means something closer to

“breath” or “life-force” or “that which animates the body.” Psuche, thus, comprehends not just our physical bodies but also our emotions, motivations, and the reasons we are alive, as well. When we “hate” our lives, then, we remove from ourselves the spectacle of self-aggrandizement and the delusion of self-sufficiency. We were never created to be alone. We need God. And we need one another. Acknowledging this need helps us reach out to others and let others reach out to us.

Relationship is, of course, the key word here. Remember that some Greeks come to see Philip, who in turn goes to see Andrew. Then they both go to see Jesus on behalf of the Greeks. There is something hierarchical implied in this arrangement: Philip is a gatekeeper of sorts and Andrew a middleman or chief-of-staff. For our purposes, we can ignore the hierarchical nature and focus on the human distance the Greeks are from Jesus. Put another way, these verses, in the context of narration, show one reality of our relationship with God—that often we ask others to mediate our relationships with God.

QUESTION: Why do you think the Greeks come to see Jesus?

QUESTION: What are they seeking? What are you seeking?

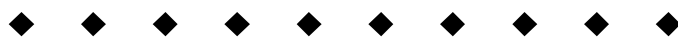
QUESTION: What promises does Jesus make to the disciples and to us?

QUESTION: What shall our response be?

QUESTION: In what ways do you ask others to mediate your relationship with Christ?

QUESTION: What are the positive aspects of this mediation?

QUESTION: What are the negative aspects of this meditation?



QUESTION: Where is the “abundance” in this passage for you?

A Liturgical Suggestion:

Praying the psalm for today (Psalm 51:1-13) at the end of the session offers a fitting conclusion to the discussion. The final verse of the portion reads: “Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.”

Planning

For

Abundance

Find Additional Resources at:
www.wvstewardship.com



The Rt. Rev. W. Michie Klusmeyer
VII Bishop of West Virginia