

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

August 24, 2014

Proper 16A/Ordinary 21A/Pentecost +11

The readings this week:

- Exodus 1:8-2:10 ◦ Psalm 124
- Romans 12:1-8 ◦ Matthew 16:13-20

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Identity Crisis?

In the gospel lesson this week, Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that am?" I'm sure that it is a result of having to face hard questions last week about whether or not Jesus could be wrong, but this conjures up images for me of times in my life when I've felt insecure and unsure of myself. To my closest friends I might ask, "What do you think I'm like, really?" or, more likely, "You don't think I'm crazy, do you?" There are moments in our lives when we just need some extra reassurance that we really are okay.

“*"How can that be?" "How could God allow that kind of power to rest with humans?" "Who am I to bind or loose anything on earth, much less in heaven?"*

Is that what was happening with Jesus? I don't think there are any scholars who would go with me on this one. And, to be honest, I'm not real sure I can either. But, I do like the question. I do appreciate considering a time in the life of Jesus when he had to look at Peter and say, "You think I'm doing this right, don't you?" Of course, he began with what all the others had to say about who the "Son of Man" is. But, just as quickly as they answer, he turns it on them, "But what about you?"

Is this a test of their own faith or an identity crisis for which Jesus needs some comfort and reassurance? Whatever it is, Peter is quick to answer. Isn't he always? "You are the Messiah, of course!" And, this seems to do the trick. For whatever it was that Jesus was looking, he got it and turns his attention away from himself and back

to his followers - Peter, in particular, the rock.

There is a word for us as well. "Whatever you bind on earth, bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth, loose in heaven. Here, take these. They are the keys to the kingdom." And, so our own identity crisis begins.

"How can that be?" "How could God allow that kind of power to rest with humans?" "Who am I to bind or loose anything on earth, much less in heaven?"

In the Romans passage, Paul reminds us of who we are. We are "living sacrifices" with "gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." Just in case you forget who you are or what you are capable of through the power of the Holy Spirit, these New Testament texts remind you. Who are you to have that power? Who are you to loose or bind on earth and in heaven? You are the very child of God, disciple of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.



Isaiah reminds us too. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug." You are a child of Abraham and Sarah and just in case you have forgotten, just in case you are having an identity crisis, to be a child of those two means you are the child of the very living God.

[Miriam's Tambourine](#)

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Exodus 1:8-2:10](#)

What has been the most costly thing you have had to do for God? What was "the sons of Israel" (Jacob's descendants) situation under a king who had forgotten Joseph's role (Ge 41) in saving the country? Why did Pharaoh's strategy backfire? What new population control plans did Pharaoh devise? Imagine the emotions of the king and the midwives when he summoned them. What was the secret of the women's self-control and wisdom? What did Moses' survival cost his mother? Has God confronted you recently with a demand for courageous faith? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 124](#)

Who do you know that is currently trusting in you for something? Are you worthy of their trust? When have you trusted someone or something only to be disappointed? How trustworthy is God? Why? When have you experienced someone "rising up against you" or "having their wrath kindled against you"? If Jesus were to speak directly to you in those times, what do you think He would say? Does it bring any comfort to know that the LORD is on our side? Why or why not? What does it mean that our HOPE is in the LORD? What are some other things or people in which we sometimes place our hope? What is one thing in your life that you can hand over to God today? [Small Group Discussions](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

*Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.*

Psalm 124:8

Gracious Lord,

When I am weak, You are my help. When I am discouraged, You are my help. When I face challenges too big for me, You are my help. When I don't know how I'm going to get everything done, You are my help. When the world around me seems uncertain and scary, You are my help. When I worry about my family, You are my help. When I worry about finances, You are my help. In every moment of life, You are my help. How I praise and thank You!

[Pray the Psalms](#)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. From Romans 12

Conformed or Transformed?

To be conformed is to be like everyone else. To be passive in the face of another's struggle. To be passive in the face of your own pain.

To be transformed is to welcome the unique character God is giving you, the special place God is sending you, the growth God sends your way. To be open to the new.

To be conformed is to turn your back to the light, to pretend it has nothing to offer, to continue on as always.

To be transformed is to turn your face to the light and to let God change you even as you watch the world around you being changed. To be renewed, over and over, in mind, heart and soul.

~ Melissa Bane Siever, [Contemplative Viewfinder](#)

3rd Reading: [Romans 12:1-8](#)

Why do you think Paul uses the imagery of "living sacrifices" to describe our proper response to God's mercy? Sometimes we view God's will as something to be avoided rather than desired. How can the last part of verse 2 correct this distortion? How can the realization that we are members of a body prevent us from thinking too highly of ourselves? What are some ways we can renew our minds and so be transformed? As you think "with sober judgment" about yourself, what gift (or gifts) do you think God has given you? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 16:13-20](#)

What is the best place to confess your faith—a church, a public setting, to your family, or where? What did it take for Peter to boldly step up with his declaration, and not adhere to the opinions of the crowd? What would it take for you? The real practice of our faith may involve a risk and even, perhaps, ridicule from others. Does this scare you, or fuel you? What would be the reason for Jesus to take the practice of faith out of just being a Temple thing and bring it to the daily places of life? Why would this be so threatening to the leaders? When and how did you take ownership of your faith? Did it help you to focus on who He really is? [Into Thy Word](#)