

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 17

Day 113. Read Judges 1.1–2.9; Luke 21.29-22.13;
Psalm 90.1-91.16; and Proverbs 13.24-25.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Judges: Throughout Joshua's lifetime and that of all the elders who had seen God's mighty acts of deliverance, the people of Israel served God. Even after God's appointed leader, Joshua, dies, Israel begins well enough: it seeks the Lord's guidance through his Word. The tribe of Judah is the first to take up the difficult task for fighting the enemy and winning the land allotted them. They, in turn, show wisdom of their own. They ask their brothers in Simeon to fight with them, promising they will go to war with them to win the territory God has given them. The people are close with God and with one another. Their purposes are one. Judah captures the hill country but is unable to drive out the Canaanites living on the plains, because they had iron chariots, weapons of war far beyond Israel's own. Other tribes go to seize the land given them by God. Manasseh enquires of God how to capture Bethel, a fortified city; and he reveals to them the strategy by which they will conquer. Manasseh does not drive out the people in the surrounding settlements, nor do Ephraim, Asher, or Naphtali. They all come to compromises with the Canaanites, allowing them to co-exist with Israel and benefiting from their forced labor, these people who worshipped idols they created themselves, and even did such detestable things as sacrifice their children to them. God, watching them veer off course, warns them: 'They will be thorns in your side, and their gods will be a snare to you.' **Questions:** 1. Where am I in my faith walk with God: ____ Exciting first glow ____ Bright flaming fire ____ Hot bed of coals ____ Flames Flickering in the Wind ____ Cooling Embers 2. What compromises have I made with the world that cools my faith and following of God? 3. Who is (or can be) my partner in the fight to keep faith alive and strong and the hard work required to receive the full life God wants me to enjoy with him? Who needs my help?

Luke: The signs are everywhere. Unmistakable. When the branches of the trees bud, you know spring is coming. So, too, the signs of the kingdom which is coming. But be careful, Jesus warns. Your heart may become weighed down. That, too, is 'natural,' for there are immensely powerful forces at work in the world working against you. In the world there is friction that will impede the most positive faith, slowing it down, leading to inertia. There is resistance. There is always resistance. In a perfect vacuum a body in motion will stay in

motion. A person moving toward God will always get where she or he wants to be. And, in a perfect world, a body at rest remains at rest...so will a heart resting in God. But this is not that world. Here a body in motion will remain in motion...until friction has its full effect...and a body at rest will stay at rest. 'Be always on watch, alert and praying that you may be able to escape...and stand before the Son of Man.' Jesus himself was no exception to this rule. As the crisis approached, Satan puts in the heart of Judas the idea to betray Jesus to the religious leaders who hate and fear him. Jesus never varies from his course, despite knowing the cross awaits him. He will follow God's unfolding plan, no matter what the world or the evil one will do. And God's timing is perfect: 'As you enter the city you will find a man carrying a water jar. Follow him to the house he enters and the owner will show you a large, furnished, upstairs room where you are to make preparations for us celebrating Passover together.' Not all the forces of the world or of evil combined can stop the salvation God is working. **Questions:** 1. What factors in my life tend to "weigh down" or weaken my joy and love flowing from my relationship with God? 2. How does it strengthen my faith to know that, despite doing the utmost they could to derail God's plan, God is still sovereign and all powerful to save? 3. What things, like hearing and reading God's word, worshipping and taking communion, having real spiritual relationship with other believers, telling others about Jesus, serving using my gifts for God, giving generously, praying, or others—'grease the skids' and keep my love and life for God alive and vital? Which will I work on next to keep growing closer to God and alive in our love?

Prayer: Lord, even as I turn to you in prayer right now, I feel the resistance...the drag on my coming closer to you. Errant thoughts intrude. My mind wanders from you. I am suddenly gone...again. It's as if I am sitting at the table with you, reading the newspaper...or in the living room together and the TV is on—and I am only somewhat present to you. My attention turns to other things. What happened yesterday. What I must do today. What I want to happen...or am afraid will happen. So Lord, I need for you to be strong for both of us. I need for you to be just what you are: completely faithful and unchanging. For both of us. Because I will change. I will wander. When I do, forgive me again, and call me back again. The deepest desire of my heart is for you. No one and nothing else even comes close. I know this, somewhere in my being; and so I keep coming back to you. You are always ready...always running toward me...to welcome me again. I praise you for such powerful love! Amen.

Day 114. Read Judges 2.10–3.31; Luke 22.14-34;
Psalm 92.1-93.5; and Proverbs 14.1-2.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Judges: What to do now? Like a rejected lover, God gets angry when his beloved leaves him for another. The anger is stronger, because God knows there is no other, and that the one he loves, by leaving him, will suffer more than imaginable. After the faithful

generation following Joshua dies, God's chosen go after the gods of the people around them, the Baals and Asherah, forsaking the One who redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and who gave them the land promised to Abraham and his descendants long before. What to do now? In his anger...and love...God gives them what they want, gives them their desire. He hands them over to lovers who are really enemies, to raiders who will plunder them. When they wanted him to fight for them, he would not, just as he had warned them through Moses...and Joshua. But then, lover that he is, God would raise up a 'judge'—a savior to rescue them lest they be finally destroyed. For a time. With the relief from suffering the consequences of their choices, the people soon veer off course again...and go after others gods...again. After that judge died...and the next...and the one after that one, who was before the next judge...the people would stubbornly return to their wandering ways. God left the temptation present. Love must be freely chosen. What is needed is a Savior who will never die...or one who dies and is resurrected to eternal life. **Questions:** 1. Do I get discouraged spiritually when I see the same cycle of wanting to do right, falling, facing the harsh consequences, and reaching out to God again, repeating itself over and over in my life? 2. Why does God permit it? Why doesn't God remove the temptations and opportunities to go wrong I stumble over? 3. How does it affect my attitude and actions in life knowing the I have a Savior who will never die?

Luke: Common stuff. Bread. Wine. Body. Blood. Life. So simple. So profound. In a mundane, miraculous meal—in the sacrifice it signifies - a new covenant is born. A new relationship between God and people. Not like the old one, the covenant of law. This is the new covenant of grace, which God establishes and seals by the blood...not of unwilling animals...but of his willing Son. See who celebrates the beginning with him. A denier. A betrayer. Friends who will forsake him when he needs them most. They are welcome at the banquet table of God. They are welcomed by the One who is Priest and Sacrifice, him who hosts and provides all who come to his table...himself, the bread of life and the cup of blessing. 'This is my body...this is my blood...of the new covenant...given...shed...for you...for the forgiveness of sins.' It is Passover, when the deliverance of God is celebrated. When the blood of the lamb without defect was smeared on the doorposts, and the Destroyer passed harmlessly over the one otherwise destined for death. They ate the lamb with bitter herbs, remembering their slavery. And that very night the slaves were set free. Now a truly perfect sacrifice is offered, once for all, to save all who otherwise are destined for death, all who in faith claim the cleansing that comes from his blood. Life is new for them. How can they be the same? How can the old ways—the ways of slavery and death—hold them any longer? Among those who partake in his body, who are cleansed by his blood, the one who serves is the great one, even as he serves. Are you now a denier? Have you forsaken him? When you turn, you...even you... will strengthen your brothers and sisters. **Questions:** 1. Is Holy Communion for me an intimate meal where Jesus demonstrates me his loving acceptance for me? Do I receive this great gift heedlessly, forgetting the promise...and the price...of this meal? 2. When I eat the bread and drink the wine of the Lord's Supper, which are the true body and blood of Christ, how does it affect me to know he lives within me, a real presence? 3. How and whom is God calling me to serve, now that I have been served by Christ, his Son?

Prayer: Bread of life, live in me. Blood of the new covenant, come and change my heart and my hands. You who served me with your body and blood, take this body and every drop of blood I have and make them yours. Living Lord, coming within me, rise and rule in me. Oh, Servant Son of God, of your great love, lead me lower. Teach me to stoop lower in serving, for it is only as I descend downward for others that I will rise to be like you. Amen

Day 115. Read Judges 4.1–5.31; Luke 22.35-53;
Psalm 94.1-23; and Proverbs 14.3-4.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Judges: The enemy's firepower far surpassed helpless Israel's. Nine hundred iron chariots to...none. Who could deliver them from such an enemy? A prophetess, Deborah, was leading Israel then. God gives her a message for Barak: Gather troops, deploy them at Mount Tabor, and I will deliver the enemies' chariots and troops into your hands. It is really 900 to One. Even so, Barak balks: 'Only if you go with me.' Deborah, good leader that she is consents, saying, 'Because you have done this, the honor of victory will go to a woman.' At Barak's advance, the Lord routed the enemy army, so even its commander abandons his chariot to flee on foot. It is a woman's hand who strikes the death blow upon him. Anyone, even the least and most helpless, among God's people can be God's instrument to turn the tide to victory. And it is Deborah, the prophetess, the woman who leads Israel, that raises the victory song. **Questions:** 1. When difficulties arise for my faith community, do I step respond by stepping forward or hang back until someone else shoulders the burden? 2. Do I trust that with God I can overcome any obstacle or defeat any enemy? What obstacles or spiritual opposition am I facing now that I can overcome only with the supernatural power of God? 3. Do I live a victorious life with joy and confidence in God's compassion and power to save?

Mark: Crescendo to the climax. God's plan of redemption is reaching fulfillment. Anyone got a sword? The twelve disciples produce two - hardly a SWAT team - armed to the teeth. Two suffice, so the scripture is fulfilled 'He was numbered among transgressors.' It's all going according to plan. Next the garden. It began in a garden, with temptation and fall, away from God's plan. Now, again in a garden, a mighty struggle of will, temptation so potent and prayer so powerful, bloody sweat falls to the ground like raindrops. 'Not my will...yours....not my will....yours....not my will....yours.' While the struggle goes on...and on...the others sleep. Some soldiers - to sleep at their post! A kiss from one of his own disciples betrays him to the crowd and soldiers are sent to arrest him. One of the swords flashes—missing its mark- as feebly a disciple seeks to defend Jesus. A superficial wound is inflicted: an ear is sliced off. 'Enough of that!' Jesus castigates him, annoyed. No problem for Jesus to heal that, who gave hearing to the deaf and raised the dead. He is seized at night, alone, apart from the crowds that flocked to hear him every day

in the temple. 'This is your hour, and the power of darkness.' All is as it should be. Darkness does as darkness is. All the while, beyond the darkness, sovereign and serene, is God, like the sun. All must be seen in his light. This was prophesied centuries before. The scripture is even now being fulfilled, even in the darkness. **Questions:** 1. In the 'war of the wills' how is it going for me? Am I saying (and living), 'Your will be done' or 'my will be done' day by day? 2. When am I tempted to defend Jesus or my faith with 'violent' means like arguing, dismissing, or putting others down, instead of offering healing love, as Jesus did to the wounded soldier sent to capture him? 3. How does prayer help me keep in God's plan for my life and for redeeming the world?

Prayer: Who me? You can't be serious, God. Most of the time I feel like a cog in a machine which is endlessly moving and never making progress. Me, an important part of your plan? Most of the time I can't even see there is a plan. The places and people around me, put there by you, according to your will? That hard to work with worker at my job? That un-neighborly neighbor? That far from friendly 'friend'? Family that acts like anything but? And you say simply, turn over my will to yours, and it will be taken care of. You promise certain victory? Oh, I see; because the turning over of my will to yours is the victory. Not the results. Not the change in others' words or actions, but the transformation in me. Just there, is the darkness, inside me. Just there, shine the light of your Christ, who came not do his own will but yours, which was his will...which is his will. Let it be, Lord. Take my will and make it yours. Today. Here. Among these people, in the places you have put me, your will be done. Amen.

Day 116. Read Judges 6.1-40; Luke 22.54-23.12;
Psalm 95.1-96.13; and Proverbs 14.5-6.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Judges: A sign would help. 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior?' Really? Is he with me? Am I a mighty warrior? What kind of a greeting is that? Whatever does God have in his mind? Times are bad. Gideon is threshing grain...in a winepress, to keep out of sight of the enemy who will seize and steal his whole crop. Times are that tough. ? I am an insignificant member of an insignificant tribe. How can I save anybody, when I can't even save myself? When there is something difficult I must do, a sign from God would sure be nice. You will be with me? Forgive me, God; but would you show me? Something simple would suffice. I don't need it spelled out clearly in the clouds. God gives a sign. Fire came from solid rock and consumed the sacrifice he had set out. All right! Now we're talking. What do you want me to do, God? Cut down the holiest relic—the symbol of Asherah, the goddess - and tear down the altar to the god, Baal, at my community's holiest shrine? Gideon does so...at night...when no one sees. When he is threatened with capital punishment by the town's people, his own father saves him. 'If Baal is a real god, why can't he defend himself?' Gideon's father demands. Faithful in the first instance, Gideon

is given a second, greater task. Deliver the nation from the amalgamated army of all their enemies. Now don't get mad, God; but will you give another sign? Okay, two signs, actually. I'll leave a fleece out overnight, and you send dew on the ground all around it, but none on the fleece. And the next night, the very opposite sign, dew on the fleece, but none on the ground. Fires and fleeces, wet and dry. Simple signs saying, 'God at work.'

Questions: 1. How am I like Gideon? In my attitude toward myself and my capabilities? In my wanting convincing evidence God is truly with me, particularly when I am confronted with a difficult situation or task, like talking about God to others of different faiths or no faith? 2. Do the signs of God presence and power already given—his Word, Baptism, The Lord's Supper, the compassionate community of faith of which I am a part—suffice for me? Does my measure of faith require more, or less, 'proof' of God's presence and power?

Luke: It is a strange game of Blind Man's Bluff. Peter slips in and out of the shadows, wishing he could be invisible, while he watches what will unfold. Three witnesses accuse him. 'This man was with him! You are one of them! You're a Galilean, just like him!' Don't know him. No way! Not me. A rooster crows. As the cry pierces his ears, unbelievable pain pierces his heart. In the flickering torchlight, the guards are beating the blindfolded Jesus, mocking him and saying, "Prophet, who was it who hit you?" All of it was prophesied, the treachery and the torture! Jesus had predicted it all. How can things that seem so totally out of control be so completely under God's control, such unnatural deeds as lying, betraying a friend, suddenly as 'natural' as a rooster crowing to greet the dawn? In the darkness of that deep night, there is a light invisible to all but the eyes of faith. Jesus proclaims he is the Son of God, sealing his fate, fulfilling the prophecy. God himself has come, as he promised. While his friends desert him, his foes join forces to destroy him. For once they are united: the religious leaders, the secular, symbolic King Herod, and the real Roman rulers. Either he is crafty, as they believe, or his is crazy, or...they are blind. **Questions:** 1. When am I most tempted to try to 'blend into the background' and not let anyone know I follow Jesus? Why? 2. How does God's grace in Christ shine all the brighter against the backdrop of denial in his people? 3. How does the honesty of Peter in later telling this story on himself, help me to lift God up by relating to others my own shortcomings and denials in my faith walk? Who needs to hear about my weaknesses, so they can be strengthened in their faith?

Prayer: Like long ago, signs would be nice now, too, Lord. Maybe they would make the difference when I have difficult work to do, like talking with others about your love for them and their deep need for you. Maybe not. Maybe I would still deny...seek to slip invisibly past the opportunity. What I really need...what I really ask for...is the heart of and mind of Christ. Then I will know for sure you are sovereign over all. Until he is fully formed in me, let me live, like Peter, surrounded and sustained in your grace. Your grace is more important than signs. Your grace is sufficient to turn me, like Peter, from a denier to a proclaimer. The only sign I need is the sign of the cross...and the empty tomb. Amen.

Day 117. Read Judges 7.1–8.17; Luke 23.13-43;
Psalm 97.1–98.9; and Proverbs 14.7-8.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Judges: Let's see. An enemy army as thick as locusts, their camels no more to be counted than the sand on the seashore, and we have...too many soldiers? Whenever did any commander complain about having too many soldiers when about to do battle? But God does. Numbers will inflate them. They will think it is their own power that won the victory. So Gideon is told: send some packing. Let's try this: send anyone who is in the least way afraid - home. Twenty-two thousand volunteer for that tough order, leaving just ten thousand. An instantaneous two-thirds force reduction. Too many still? Give them the water fountain test. Send them all to the stream. The dainty ones who won't stoop, who won't lie on the soil and lap up the water, but kneel daintily and use cupped hands politely instead, send them home on leave till after the war. Only three hundred are willing to 'do laps.' Total reduction in force: 99 percent plus. Plus God, that is. Perfect. Now we have the right number. Now all is ready.. A little reconnaissance first: Gideon steals close to the enemy camp to overhear...their battle plans? Not hardly!. A dream. God has 'messed with their minds.' It is psychological warfare long before it was invented. In a dream an enemy warrior has seen the outcome of the battle: they will be beaten by...a barley loaf! A fellow warrior interprets: that means God has given the whole camp into Gideon's hands. Clay pots and crying out loud complete the plan. Final score: one army defeated; one people delivered. How good is our God?! **Questions:** 1. Do I really believe that if I surrender myself to God as Gideon and the 300 did I ,too, can be 'an army of one'? Do I live and act every day as though God can and will accomplish amazing things through me, even in the face of tough opposition? 2. What things do I tend to think too dirty or demanding to do for God? Are there ways of serving or tasks to do that I shy away from because I am afraid or I think them beneath me? 3. Do I truly live in the light of the victory of the God/Man, Jesus Christ, over sin, death and the devil, rejoicing like someone in a conquering army?

Luke: Initial verdict: not guilty. Strange sentencing, though: punishment before release. It is mercy, mingled with geopolitics. The decision is a sop to those who want him dead. Hurt him, humiliate him, handle him by showing him he's not even significant enough to kill. Why make more of him than he is? The crowd cries louder: Crucify him. Second verdict: still not guilty. Second sentence, same as the first: punishment and release. CRUCIFY HIM! they demand. Third time's a 'charm'—the sentence suddenly: Death! Release the killer Barabbas, and crucify the King. Strange justice. Stranger mercy, in the one who received no mercy: he weeps for those who weep for him; he begs mercy for those who would show none to him. "Father forgive"...they don't know what they are doing...or to whom. The 'king of the Jews?' How about the King of Kings? A thief sees something in

him—a strange mercy from some other world, some eternal dimension. Remember me when you come into your kingdom, Jesus! “Today, you will be with me in paradise!” the Judge has spoken. Strange justice, that the one who is innocent suffers for the guilty. Strange—miraculous—mercy; the guilty are given new life! **Questions:** 1. Realistically, and honestly, what would I have done had I been in Pilate’s place that day? One of the crowd? One of the thieves on the cross? 2. How do I feel (and act) knowing that I, like Barabbas, have been set free by Christ taking my place? 3. Do I truly live with Jesus as my King, anticipating the coming of his Kingdom?

Prayer: 33,000? 300? It only takes one, to save a world. God, you are truly amazing. Truly, there is no other god like you. Who would ever imagine such a strategy? No human mind could make this up. In one person, Jesus Christ, your Son in human flesh, you have won the war humanity has been waging...and losing...throughout all of history. Sin and death and the demonic have all been conquered, by one person dying on a cross like a common criminal. And rising from the tomb. And ascending to your right hand. My sin, my death, my demons, conquered. My tomb empty, my ascent, my paradise and my place with the Father. My Christ, my king, your endless kingdom come! Your kingdom come, where mercy and justice are maintained together, mercy made open to all as the just punishment falls upon you, the innocent Son of God. Come, my crucified King, and rule over the least part of your Kingdom. Come through my words and deeds, my valiant sacrifices and my shameful defeats, and let me serve you as my sovereign. I acknowledge no other. I need no other. I desire no other, but you. Amen. Amen!

Day 118. Read Judges 8.18–9:21; Luke 23.44–24.12; Psalm 99.1–9; and Proverbs 14.9-10.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: Gideon, how did it happen to you, of all people? You were given the signs. You were given the success. After all that, will you go wrong? Already a victorious general, they made you the next thing to a king. ‘Rule over us!’ they cried. And you did. Gideon’s first move was to make a golden, religious relic and put it in his hometown. Were you trying to unite your people by making one place of worship, preempting God’s own plan to do so one day? It worked. The people came...and worshiped something made by human hands. With seventy sons, Gideon rules Israel. But as soon as Gideon dies, Israel forgets God again, to chase after yet another local god. Short memory. They also forget what Gideon and his family had done for them. They make a son of Gideon and a slave girl their king—after he first murders all his brothers but one, who escapes. Israel, how could you go so wrong so soon? The stage is set for the coming of the kings to Israel... and disaster.

Questions: 1. How can ‘successes’ in my faith walk and work with God be dangerous to

me spiritually? To my faith community? 2. Any organization involving humans can and will go wrong, because it is comprised of sinful people. How can my faith community keep on track with God? How can it make 'mid-course corrections' continually to keep from ending up way off course? What can I do to help it keep on course?

Luke: Look! You can see...anyone can see...what no one is ever to see! You can actually look into...the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwells, the innermost place in the Temple. The curtain is torn in two, and the way is open. Why, I could even walk there! Only one man is supposed to go there and only once a year! The High Priest enters alone when he offers incense on the Day of Atonement. A cord is tied around his waist before he passes through the thick curtain that screens access...and sight...into the holiest place where God dwells. If he were to faint...or even die...no one could go after him. To look on God, sinful as we are, is to die. But on this day, suddenly, the curtain tore in two. It was so quick, I couldn't help myself; my eyes followed the sound and saw the Holies of Holies. Where was God? I didn't die? Only later I learned the reason. God was dying himself outside the city on a cross, an outcast, a criminal; so that I might not die, but for the first time, truly live. The way was opened for me...for everyone...into the presence of God. He is the Way, not the law and its endless sacrifices. If you want to look on God, look on him! Through the door his death opened, everyone is welcomed! Even the centurion overseeing the execution! But do not go to the tomb where they laid him. That holy place is as empty as the Holy of Holies was when the curtain tore in two at his death. By dying and rising, he has ripped apart the very fabric of the universe. Sinners are forgiven! Death works backwards! Do you wonder where you will see God? Look for his body alive and at work in the world; that's where he will be! Women—counted as nothing by society - are the first commissioned as apostles—people sent to share the news!

Questions: 1. Which 'miracle' amazes me most: God becoming human at Jesus Christ's birth as the God/Man in Bethlehem; God's death on the cross for sinners like me; Christ's destroying sin and death by rising from the dead; my being picked personally to be part of his mystical living body, the Church, alive and at work in the world; my receiving Christ's true body and blood in bread and wine in Holy Communion; his living within me by the power of his Holy Spirit; or _____? 2. To whom am I sent to share the earth-shaking, life-transforming news of Christ crucified and risen?

Prayer: Lord, you know how empty I was. The empty holy of holies on the day your Son died....mirrors and mimics the emptiness I felt when I was under the law's unblinking, unforgiving gaze. Your Law, so good in itself, smothered me like a shroud, with guilt and shame. I could never keep the Law: it only revealed my failures, condemned me, defeated me. Yet, it did drive me, with that relentless, aching emptiness, to you and your grace. But the empty cross...the empty tomb...suddenly my emptiness is filled. With wonder. With joy. With life. With love. He who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being obedient to his death, even death on a cross, has filled me with hope and peace and power - his resurrection power. Come, Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ and of his Resurrection, and live in your temple, fill me with Christ overflowing, so others see not me, but Christ alive for them. Amen.

Day 119. Read Judges 9.22–10.18; Luke 24.13-53; Psalm 100.1-5; and Proverbs 14.11-12.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Judges: Tola. Jair. The long list of saviors continues. So does the list of Israel's faithlessness. And their gods. After each judge died, Israel served other gods...the Baals...the Ashtoreth...the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, the Ammonites, even the Philistines. God 'sold' them to their enemies—allowing them to become slaves again as they had been in Egypt, but not because they sold themselves to false gods that could not save them. Every time, under the whip of oppression, Israel cried out to the Lord. Finally, he sends a message: "Go cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you!" The Israelites learned something: better to be under the angry God than enslaved to gods that can do nothing. God, however angry, is still long suffering, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. They are desperate. 'Do to us whatever you will, only rescue us!' They even got rid of their gods. Sure enough, as if on cue, God relents again; because 'he could bear their misery no longer.' God will suffer almost anything, so his people won't have to suffer. His pain over their pain is unbearable. **Questions:** 1. What does it say of God's love for me that he hurts whenever I hurt myself, or am hurt by others, or hurt others? 2. Do I, like Israel, ever presume on God's grace and forgiveness? Do I knowingly commit wrong anyway, expecting God's forgiveness in Christ? 3. For what areas of my life do I need to cry out for God's deliverance? Is there something I am giving pre-eminence to in God's rightful place?

Luke: There are two paths in life: away from pain, and toward joy. The two disciples are heading away from pain. The problem: like a stray dog, it follows you. The day is dying. A stranger appears from nowhere; someone no one recognizes. 'What's the news?' he asks. They stop in their tracks. Where has this stranger been? Doesn't he know? The hope of Israel has died. On a cross. Worse news: his body is gone. Wild tales about him being alive, but they are quite literally 'wives tales,' since it was only women who told them. The men checked it out...the tomb was empty, but the body? Nowhere to be found. The stranger just shakes his head. How foolish and how slow of heart! Starting with Moses and all the prophets, he opens up the scriptures. 'Did not the hope of Israel have to suffer these things and only then enter his glory?' It was ordained, settled by God long before. They have reached the end of the day's journey. The Stranger is pressing on, but they press him to stay. To break bread. And suddenly they recognize him. In the breaking of the bread. Was it the words, which they had heard before, perhaps when he fed thousands by the sea, or a dozen in an upper room? Was it the scars of the nails in hands that glimmered pale like moonlight in the deepening gloom? Was it the voice itself. Their hearts burned as he opened the scriptures on the way. Soon their lungs are

burning...nearly bursting...as they run back to Jerusalem, the 'city of peace', to tell the news of peace: 'He is risen!' They are on a different path...no longer away from pain...but toward joy. Tragedy has turned to comedy. They rush in to tell the news...that is old news. 'We know already! He appeared to Simon!' All the while, the woman were smiling knowingly to one another, and shaking their heads at the denseness of the men. No news there! Suddenly Jesus himself stands among them...a Stranger no more. 'Touch me!' he invites them. They could not believe what they were forced to believe, because of joy and amazement. But wait. There is more! Wait until power has come upon you from on high!

Questions: 1. How long in my life did Jesus walk beside me without my really knowing him? How often in my daily routine do I go about unconscious of his living presence with me? 2. How does God 'open up the scriptures' to me? Do I make the effort to seek out his teaching? 3. When I am discouraged, how does Jesus encourage me? In his Word? In the breaking of the bread? In the community gathered around the resurrected Christ? My having been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection? Seeing Christ in the others I serve for him?

Prayer: My Lord, Christ, how can I not recognize you when you walk with me, talk with me, on the everyday road I wander? So often it seems pointless, a world of pain and purposelessness. Open the eyes of my heart to hear you, to see you. Forgive my foolish forgetfulness. Resurrected Son of God, rise in me. Ever-living Son of Man, make me a human who is fully living, truly living, as only those redeemed in you do live. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 17

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Judges 10.6-16

Psalm: 100

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Luke 24.13-35.

Theme: What God Cannot Bear

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation:

The almighty cannot bear everything. There is one thing God cannot bear: the misery of the people he loves. He cannot bear it even when they suffer the consequences of their own choices, the 'just desserts' they deserve. Israel in the time of the judges was stuck in a seemingly endless cycle of faithlessness, turning from God, suffering the consequences, crying out for deliverance, turning for a time to God, celebrating God's deliverance, and going astray again as soon as the current savior, or judge, died. In the lesson, God 'loses it.' He tells the people off: go ask the 'gods' you've chosen. But in the end, he gives into their pleading, like a father stuck in a car with whining children. In the Gospel, two discouraged disciples are running away, their hopes dashed, doubting the unlikely news of some distraught women, but believing the news of the Lord's death. They

don't recognize him when he appears and walks beside them...for miles. With a little understandable exasperation, he patiently opens all the scripture and explains to them how it all had to happen according to God's preposterous plan. He can't bear their pain...and their ignorance, so he shows himself to them in the breaking of the bread. They can't bear to keep the secret to themselves. Christ himself appears again, in the midst of the amazed disciples, dispelling their fear, and turning their pain and confusion into joy. So he will for any sufferer who turns to him.