

The Lord's Song in a Foreign Land

Monday, 11/9/09 – Read Psalm 137:1-6

My Observations _____

A Question to Answer: Increasingly we live in a culture that that is indifferent to faith. But this is not the first time! Throughout our history, God's people have found themselves living in an alien culture. Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., and the leadership of the Jews was carried off into exile in Babylon. Psalm 137 comes from that time of exile in Babylon. The poignant question is in verse 4: How do you sing the Lord's song in a foreign and alien land? ... How would you answer that? How do you "sing the Lord's song," how do you live faithfully, in a world that is indifferent to your faith?

Tuesday, 11/10/09 – Read Acts 6:8-15, Acts 7:54-8:1

My Observations: _____

A Question to Answer: Stephen is recognized as the first martyr of the church -- the first person to be killed because of his faith in Jesus. Physical martyrdom is not a risk for us -- though there are places in the world where physical persecution is very real. ... Have you ever felt put down or demeaned or ridiculed because of your faith? Have you ever been passed over or missed out on an opportunity because of your faith? ... Persecution is much more subtle today. Has there ever been an instance when you experienced some subtle persecution?

Wednesday, 11/11/09 – Read Hebrews 10:32-36

My Observations: _____

A Question to Answer: Off and on, for almost three hundred years, Christianity endured persecution. The letter to the Hebrews in the later part of the New Testament was written to encourage the faithful who were living under the threat (and the reality!) of persecution. ... Today's reading lifts up the virtue of endurance. What is endurance? How would you define it? Is endurance an important virtue for you? Are there some things in life that simply have to be endured?

Thursday, 11/12/09 – Read Isaiah 49:1-6

My Observations: _____

A Question to Answer: Today's reading comes from the time of the Babylonian exile. (See Monday's question.) ... During this time the exiled Jews discovered new understandings and insights into God's purposes. One of these was that God's purpose is universal: God is concerned for the whole human family, for all the peoples of the earth. The Jews discovered or realized that they couldn't just hide in a little enclave, they couldn't care just about themselves ("the tribes of Jacob"); they realized that they were being sent by God in mission to this foreign culture. "I will give you as a light to the nations," God says in Isaiah 49:6. ... In what ways do you think God is sending us today in mission to a culture and a people increasingly indifferent to faith?

Friday, 11/13/09 – Read Acts 17:16-34

My Observations: _____

A Question to Answer: As you read through today's passage, think about the way the Apostle Paul approached the philosophers in Athens. He carefully observes their religious symbols -- the statues in the Areopagus. And then he begins by making a connection between their symbols and the message about Jesus. ... What do you think of Paul's strategy?

Are there connections you can see between our secular culture today and the message of Christian faith?

Saturday, 11/14/09 – Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

My Observations: _____

A Question to Answer: The new Christians in pagan Corinth were confronted by some thorny questions. When they went to dinner in the homes of their pagan neighbors, they could never be sure whether the meat being served for dinner had been part of an offering in one of the pagan temples. Should they refuse to eat and risk offending their neighbors? If they did eat, were they tacitly affirming the pagan deities? ... Do you ever experience any conflicts between your faith and the practices of your friends and neighbors? ... Paul resolved the Corinthian question by saying that it really didn't matter since the pagan deities didn't actually exist. It became a matter of conscience. ... How do you resolve the conflicts you encounter?

Sunday, 11/15/09 – Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

My Observations: _____

A Question to Answer: How do we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? ... First and foremost we have to stay clear about the heart and the core of our faith in the grace of God given in Jesus. This is harder than it may at first seem. We are thinking people, and we want to be open-minded. We want to be in conversation with the ideas in the world around us. And sometimes, in the process, we can lose clarity about the essentials of our own faith. ... Take a moment today and write down in one or two sentences, your understanding of the core of your faith.

My Faith Journal, November 8, 2009
You Asked for It, #9 – Dealing with Difference (1)
Secularism

What do I hear God saying to me today?

Psalm 137
Hebrews 10:32-36
Isaiah 49:1-6

What action do I intend to take this week?

Each day this week, take a few minutes. Begin with PRAYER. Then READ through the Bible passage indicated on the inside of this guide. WRITE down your own thoughts, reactions, observations. ANSWER THE QUESTION to begin connecting the Bible with your life. Use additional paper or your own notebook if you need more space to write.