

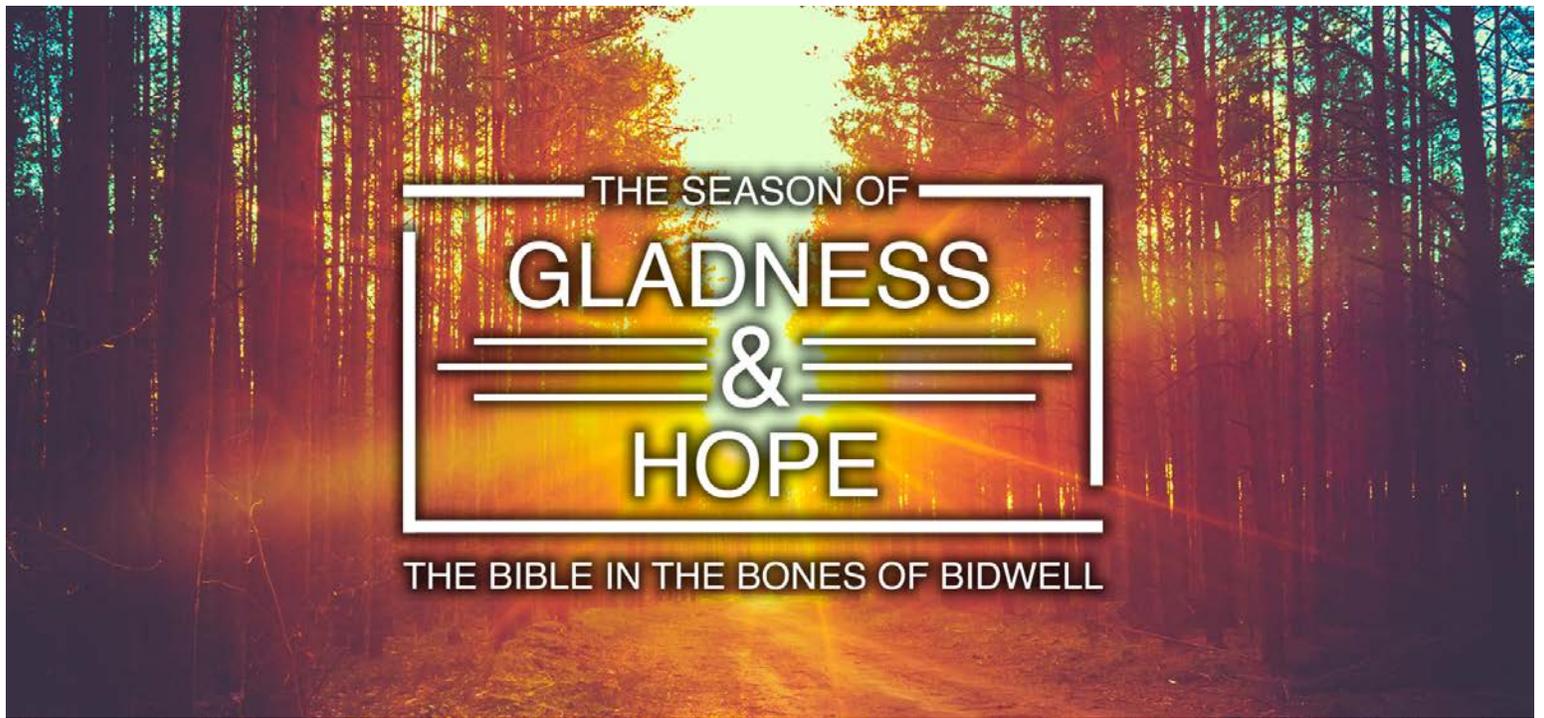
ENCOUNTERING ANCIENT RHYTHMS



CHANGING ME, CHANGING YOU

A Weekly Devotion and Spiritual Guide of
Bidwell Presbyterian Church

APRIL 18, 2021



CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	pg 3
II. God's Story.....	pg 4
Acts 3:12-19, Psalm 4, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36-48	
III. Weekly Scriptures with Insight and Commentary.....	pgs 5 - 7
IV. Memory Verses.....	pg 8
V. Ancient Rhythm Formation Exercise.....	pg 9
VI. Life Group Questions.....	pg 10

I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this edition of Encountering Ancient Rhythms: A Weekly Devotion and Spiritual Guide. We have prepared this for you not only for your personal use but also for your Life Group study if you're currently in one. The purpose behind this packet is to promote your learning of Scripture, its integration into your life, and to unite Bidwell behind its vision to grow Deeper in Christ. We hope it will encourage you to have regular Scripture passages to focus on each week and empower you to live daily as Christ's disciple. We invite you to work through it at your own pace and apply it as it suits your convenience and where you are on the journey.

The following reflections are prepared by Pastors Henry Hansen, Shannon Coon, and Ray Medina. The Scriptures are derived from a resource¹ we're using for our purposes that interrelate if you read them closely. Also, they provide substantive amounts of verses to integrate into your habit of reading and devotion. May they and this guide enrich your spiritual life and promote your walk with Christ.

Faithfully Yours,

Henry Hansen
Senior Pastor

II. GOD'S STORY

Read this week: Acts 3:12-19, Psalm 4, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36-48

These Scriptures continue to lead us into the season that is known as Easter Tide which lasts seven Sundays. As we look at our four passages, you'll note that one of the Old Testament segments is replaced by an additional New Testament text – namely, the book of Acts. This allows us ample time to consider the implications of Christ's resurrection and how this truth began the formation of the early church. Our Scriptures also show that we are set apart as God's faithful because of his great love for us. And that we have a distinct identity as God's children. This calls us into a life of repentance and renewal.

As you read these Scriptures, consider your own role in this narrative. What angle of the implication of Christ's resurrection that is presented in these texts most convict and prompt you toward holy and righteous living? Who do you relate to as you think about how each of the followers of Jesus and religious authorities responded to Christ's resurrection from the grave? Lean into God's story. Place yourself into the shoes of the members of the early church. Consider how grand shaking the news would have been of Jesus rising from the grave. Martin Luther the 16th-century reformer once said: "Live as if Christ died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back tomorrow." Perhaps the sense of urgency of all that Jesus has accomplished and will accomplish by his power could prompt us toward holy living during this new season.

III. WEEKLY SCRIPTURES WITH INSIGHT AND COMMENTARY

Acts 3:12-19

In this excerpt from Acts, Peter and John have gone up to the temple (in Jerusalem) to pray and happened upon a crippled man. Peter called out to the man and said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” (v6). The man was healed and the witnesses to this healing were astonished, making quite a commotion about what has just happened. After that, Peter addresses them (calling them “fellow Israelites” because they are Jews at the temple) by pointing to the story by which this man could even be healed – the story of “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers...” (v13) also embodied in Jesus, who was killed by the Jewish leaders (by them handing him over to Pilate) and was raised from the dead. It is because of all this that Peter could call on the name of Jesus and evoke a healing power to this crippled man.

Peter is even more precise about how this man is healed. He says, “by faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him,” (v16). There is more to healing than calling on Jesus’ name. Faith is vital. NT Wright says, “There has to be faith, faith in the one who speaks the name, faith in the one who hears it,” (NT Wright, Acts for Everyone, Part 1, p 56).

Finally, this excerpt finishes with Peter inviting them: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshment may come from the Lord,” (v19). The imperative to “repent” is not a new concept, nor is the promise that repentance leads to sins being “wiped out.” But the idea of “refreshment” is quite unique here. This conjures up the image of a thirst being quenched. God not only forgives the sins of those who have faith in Jesus Christ and thereby repent, but God also provides refreshment for those who continue their walk of faith.

Personal Reflection: What kinds of “refreshment” do you regularly turn to for your walk of faith? What

helps you keep your faith “fresh?” Is it regular times of solitude? Specific styles of prayer? Scripture reading? Fellowshiping? Communing with nature? If you do not have intentional ways to receive refreshment for your faith walk, what is something you could pursue in the immediate future?

For Extra: This monologue of Peter’s is full of scriptural references. When he says, “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers...” (v13), he is quoting Exodus. It is a famous passage which Peter and fellow Jews would have recognized. This is an important reference because it is when God calls Moses through the burning bush to go to Egypt and lead God’s people out of slavery to freedom. God tells Moses to use this descriptor when presenting to the Israelites so that they know the one true God, whom they worship, is the One who is making good on His promises to them. Take time to read Exodus 3 to read the exchange between God and Moses. Jesus himself also quoted this when debating with the Sadducees in the temple just a few weeks before Peter was there. Take time to read the exchange between Jesus and the Sadducees in Luke 20:27-38.

Psalm 4

This Psalm is about where to place our ultimate trust in hard times. At first glance, it appears to be a passage about an individual under persecution for righteousness by one’s enemies.² The first three verses would suggest this. But upon further reading, there’s more to this Psalm. A look at the final verses is quite revealing. They would show us that because there was a drought around the time of harvest, it caused God’s people to panic. This circumstance is tempting them to worship false deities rather than Yahweh.³ This Psalm can speak to us in a time of crisis regarding where to turn and whose help to call upon in a time of distress and uncertainty. And certainly, for those who farm and crop, this Psalm can be quite relatable. It charges us to yield to Yahweh alone for help.

III. WEEKLY SCRIPTURES WITH INSIGHT AND COMMENTARY

This Psalm is one of Lament. It's a lament as much for the community as it is for the individual. More Psalms than not include lament in them. We have a strong and powerful tradition of people who cry out to God. This habit of lament never grew tired. God's people never would run out of tries for receiving God's help. Our God is our constant rescuer.

Personal Reflection: This lament is less of an individual one for one's own circumstance as it is on behalf of an entire community. How often do you lament a prayer not only for yourself but on behalf of your community? Are there any sins that others commit that you find need to be presented to the throne of God's grace? What role do lament and that of communal lament play in your own faith? Consider applying this prayer by the Psalmist only in a different, more contemporary circumstance. Find a circumstance that requires the lament of God's people.

For Extra: Look at the 8th verse. To what degree do you lie down and sleep in peace? Consider the power and efficacy of prayer. What entitles the Psalmist to sleep so soundly and with such great contentment?

1 John 3:1-7

Spiritual amnesia is a primary theme in the bible. A common theme and even command given to God's people: Remember! There are innumerable accounts of this in the Bible. For starters, see Exodus 20:8, Deuteronomy 9:7, Matthew 28:20, and Revelation 3:3. It's a general call for God's people to recall their relationship to Yahweh and that this affords them special status.

John 3 is yet another "remember" passage, though without saying it. The first verse sets the tone for the rest: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." It's this unique status that should prompt us to do good over evil. Remembering who we are and bearing the Christian name makes all the difference. It's a matter

of identity. Being children of God affords us special benefits. In a sense, none of the rules apply to us when it comes to hardship because through Christ we cry "Abba Father," (Romans 8:14-17) and he hears us. It is through Christ we can make such a claim; this grants us access to God as Father. At the same time, all of the rules apply to us because when it comes to morality, we need to constantly be serving and looking toward God's best. By remembering our special status as God's children, glorifying our heavenly Father can become as natural as wishing to honor our own biological family and make them proud as their kid. (This assumes of course we held positive feelings toward mom and dad).

This Scripture also reveals a present and future dimension to this acceptance of being God's child. There's more to be revealed. There's more to what people will see in us as Christ's power is revealed through us. And there's more we will see as God's glory works in and through us. There's more to know of God. We need to hold out for that hope continuously, with the understanding that God has more to show us even when we feel we've arrived.

Finally, there's a word of caution in this Scripture. False teachers exist in every time and place. The final verses of 1 John 3 show this was the case in this pastoral letter. We may be tempted to fall away to claims of teachers that are new age, unorthodox in teaching, or even to a field such as science (which can teach us a great deal about nature but is limited in its claims about the existence of God). The media can be another false teacher or prophet. It's vitally important that above all, our identity is steeped as God's beloved children - loved by our Heavenly Father. This keeps us grounded in God's Truth and gives us discerning hearts and minds to know false truth from the Truth.

Personal Reflection: As you've faced varying opinions this past year or even weeks or months about the pandemic or other events, have you felt grounded and centered in your relationship with God

III. WEEKLY SCRIPTURES WITH INSIGHT AND COMMENTARY

such that you can discern how much you listen for truth from fields like science, the media, and politicians? Consider your own filter for truth and the importance of being grounded in your relationship with God in Christ. You're a child of God.

For Extra: Look at verse 2a. Where does your imagination take you as you ponder what is not yet revealed? Consider this important dimension of Christian hope. We may sometimes think we have the full picture (or close to) in mind in this life. But there's the best that's yet to come. Ponder that in your own walk.

Luke 24:36-48

It's somewhat astonishing how many resurrection stories there are. This scripture is the third story in Luke alone. We can look at Luke's account and consider the implications of the risen Jesus for the church today. First, as we see in Luke's account, doubt is a common experience to the risen Jesus even in the midst of joy. When it comes to our witness as the church, we cannot blame people for having a hard time getting their heads around our central claim that "Christ is risen." This is not verifiable in the modern world and it seems pretty out there. Yet Luke will emphasize that it is Christ himself who reveals the truth of his suffering and risen victory in the Scriptures. We might add that this encounter with the truth of Christ in Scripture occurs in the gathered community the church who always makes room for doubters and skeptics.

Luke's fish story calls our attention to the risen Jesus was indeed embodied and real. Smart, noble religious thinkers today still want to cast the risen Christ as no more than a symbolic idea or a beautiful metaphor for new life. Of course, the resurrection is a powerful metaphor, but Luke says that Jesus also ate fish. This funny detail does not prove anything, but its inclusion does highlight a bodily reality, not merely a symbolic gesture. We might add that the truth of the resurrection today shows up in real and transformed lives, not just in religious speech or cognitive beliefs.

Finally, Luke's commissioning by Jesus says that the disciples are to proclaim "the repentance for the forgiveness of sins," (v47). We read of this happening after the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost in Acts 2, also written by Luke. Our witness to Jesus is vitally connected to our being deeply in touch with the Holy Spirit's work in our own lives. Also, we like to emphasize the forgiveness part of our message while leaving "repentance" high and dry. The risen Christ does not separate these. The whole message is one of forgiveness and a transformed life, which is how Eugene Peterson rightly translates "repentance" in his Message Bible translation.

Personal Reflection: How do you react to the idea of Jesus' physical, risen body? Does it at times sound far-fetched? How do you make room for honest questions, doubts, and candid skepticism in the church? Do you agree that "we like to emphasize the forgiveness part of our message while leaving repentance high and dry?" If so, why do you think that is?

For Extra: Luke's resurrection account has similarities and differences when compared to the account we read in worship last week in John 20. Why these differences? Interestingly, the variants in the resurrection stories add credibility to their authenticity rather than diminish it. The fact that several themes in these stories overlap while details vary demonstrates that these events were being told and retold in various communities in various ways. Critical themes such as Jesus' bodily resurrection, his commissioning the disciples, his eating fish, and his multiple appearances provide what scholars call "multiple attestations," meaning that more than one verifiable witness saw the physical body of the risen Christ appear, eat, and talk! It's quite amazing.

2. <https://www.explainingthebook.com/psalm-4-1-8/>
3. Gerard Wilson, NIV Application Commentary

IV. MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

1 JOHN 3:1

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

Learn this verse and ponder its profound importance. The explanation of the formation exercise below explains why it is so vital. Remember it's a connection to your own stress in life and any sense of pride or lack of value. Consider also the behavioral dimension to this: we're called to holy living. The third verse of this chapter says: "All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." Holiness is the mandate of any Christian who takes seriously this new identity given to us by Christ as God's children.

V. ANCIENT RHYTHM FORMATION EXERCISE

Be cognizant of your emotional responses this week to certain events that trigger stress, personal pride, or lack of self-worth. Verse 1 of 1 John 3 says: “Behold what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.” This is a profound statement with significant claims about our lives. It means all of life is lived with this identity in mind. We are ultimately children of God; we look to him alone to care for our lives. There’s no room for boastful living nor stress of exponential proportions nor a sense of lack of value. Our identity is shaped by our relationship with God the Father.

Then verse three of this Scripture goes onto say: “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” This identity leads us to not only find comfort in this new identity but to apply its truth when it comes to our behavior. Purity is not merely a passive event, but an active one. We are meant to incorporate every part of this new identity into our lifestyles.

As you think about our identity as children of God, adopted by our heavenly Father, let this truth sink in. Look at areas of life where there’s a lack of congruence and let his image in you be one you live up to.

VI. LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS (SERMON)

“It’s Not Something You Earn, It’s Something You Live Up To”

Message by Pastor Henry Hansen

April 18, 2021

1 John 3:1-7

GETTING STARTED

How are you experiencing new life around you today?

LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

1. What does it mean to be a child of God rather than the notion that we’re created in God’s image?
2. What does verse two mean in terms of “what will be revealed in us?”
3. Look at verse three. What is the relationship between it and verse one? What does this say about the application of holiness?
4. Read the section above about 1 John 3. Is there anything there that helps you understand this passage differently?

LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

4. What does the status of being God’s “child” mean to you? Consider its application in various parts of your life. How is this reminder helpful? Consider also the application of it in terms of verse 3.
5. What situation in your life could use this reminder and the need of living up to this God-given status as his child? What does adoption mean to you in terms of God’s perspective?

SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS