

Sunday, April 23, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Loosening the Bonds
Bible Study
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 and 1 Peter 1:17-23

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants share their responses to the question, “What brings you hope?”

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19. Context. This psalm is a song of thanksgiving to God for deliverance from death and the psalmist’s profession of devotion to God. It is one of a group of praise (Hallel) psalms that reflect the experience of God’s liberation in the Exodus and in the return from Exile. Along with the other Hallel psalms (115-118) it continues to be used in the Jewish Passover celebration. The psalmist calls upon the name of the Lord – precisely what the prophet Joel enjoined his hearers to do in the verses from his prophecy that Peter used to frame his first sermon on the day of Pentecost. Psalm 116 may well have been a part of the response of those who were convinced by Peter that day. And as the psalmist demonstrates his devotion by worshipping God in the Temple, so those who responded to Peter repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus, receiving the forgiveness of their sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:17-23. Context. There is a certain correspondence between this week’s reading from 1 Peter and Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts: in both, Peter speaks of the gift of salvation that has come through the crucified and risen Christ and that demands a response from those who trust in God. In Acts Peter was addressing Jews who were convinced by his message, had “called on the name of the Lord,” were baptized, and looked for the day when God’s faithful would be gathered from exile into the kingdom. But in 1 Peter the author addresses a Gentile audience that had already been baptized and saved into exile: as Christians in a non-Christian world they were cut off from much of their former lives. But they were still to love those amongst whom they found themselves – the opening verse here alludes to God judging/loving “all people impartially according to their deeds” even, perhaps especially, those who had not been baptized. In his Pentecost sermon Peter had promised the gift of the Holy Spirit; here, that gift takes the concrete form of “genuine mutual love.”

Read Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 and 1 Peter 1:17-23

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 and 1 Peter 1:17-23 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Some reflection questions –

- Psalm 116:2 says, “Because God inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.” What do you think it means that “God inclined his ear to me”?
- What might “you have loosed my bonds” (Psalm 116:16 New Revised Standard Version) or “you’ve freed me from my chains” (Common English Bible) mean? Will you share if you have had an experience that these metaphors describe?
- What do you think are the “perishable things like silver or gold” in our current life? (1 Peter 1:18)
- What does Peter’s contrast of “perishable things like silver or gold” with “the precious blood of Christ” highlight?
- What does Peter’s statement, “Your faith and hope are set on God,” mean to you? What might it mean for your church community? (1 Peter 1:21)
- How does what Peter said lead to his command to “love one another deeply from the heart” (v. 22)?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Gracious and Loving God, we give you thanks for inclining your ear to us. We have been born anew, not of perishable but imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. Even though we have committed sins, “*you have loosed our bonds.*” Now help us to share our joy in our homes, churches, communities, and the world. **Amen.** (Adapted from Psalm 116)

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.