

Luke

Jesus' words and actions bring both love and a challenge to everyone in his path. We follow his journey through the last half of Luke's gospel, noting the increasing intensity of interactions as he approaches the cross. From dramatic healings of lepers to stories meant to probe the hardened hearts of Pharisees, Jesus' message reaches our hearts and minds today. We listen in on some paradoxical talk of the upside-down Kingdom of God (13:18–21), hear parables about persistence and coming justice for the lowest members of society, and observe Jesus' last prayers and actions before his death and resurrection. May we also be transformed by the truth of the resurrection.

Leviticus

We are treated to a close-up examination of the laws, rituals, and patterns that governed the lives of the ancient Israelites and see behind it all the hand of a holy God, reaching toward his people. The specific instructions on types of offerings and meticulous methods required in order to engage with God remind the people how unique and omnipotent their God is. From acceptable foods to rites around cleanliness, we can see God's care for all details of human existence.

1 & 2 Thessalonians

Paul joyfully writes to these new believers, praising God for their 'endurance' (1:3) and 'deep conviction' (1:5). These are persecuted people who have become an example to believers in many places. We hear of Paul's earnest service to them and of Timothy's visit when Paul cannot be present. Paul repeatedly encourages these believers to stand firm in the faith and to keep busy doing good works.

Hosea

A prophet who not only spoke but lived out the message of God's longing for the return of a wayward people, Hosea's life and words carry some hard messages for us as we hear his words today. Hosea's life is a passionate pursuit of the one who continually fails and betrays him – a parallel to the faith of the Israelites and perhaps to our own journey. Hope exists for those who return to God.

Jonah

The second of our prophets this quarter provides a stark behavioral contrast to Hosea. Jonah's extreme defiance of God's call is striking. We are encouraged to focus on his attitude and personal behavior in this book more than on the message he finally delivers. Are we like him?

Titus

Paul writes to Titus, a young church planter on the island of Crete. The letter encourages Titus to lead in an active departure from some of the cultural practices and to form mentoring relationships between generations. Paul reminds Titus and all believers of the immeasurable gift of redemption through Christ and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. The advice in this short letter is powerful for both the early church and for us today.