



# GPS GUIDE: OCTOBER 1, 2023 G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

## **GPS for the week following World Communion Sunday**

### **Monday: Read Matthew 2:1-6, Luke 2:1-7, John 6:35**

Bethlehem – it almost didn't seem like a real place to me as a child. I grew up thinking of it as a quaint, almost fictional, setting for the first Christmas – a town bustling with sandal-wearing people, lots of animals and suddenly one night, a baby is born in a small open pole barn surrounded by lots of clean hay. Not very realistic, right? The real Bethlehem was small, smelly, and insignificant. Bethlehem. The perfect place for this prophetic birth of Jesus. But what if the city of Bethlehem was a prophecy in itself? The Hebrew word for Bethlehem (בֵּית לֶחֶם) is actually 2 words. *Bet* meaning house and *Lehem* meaning bread, so Bethlehem is literally translated “house of bread.” Jesus was not born in the house of royalty, or the house of riches, or the house of celebrity. Jesus was not born in Jerusalem, or in Rome, or in Athens or Alexandria. Not in any political, commercial, cultural, educational, or socially significant city. Jesus was born in the house of bread. What significance do you find in the meaning of Bethlehem's name? What does this name say about who Jesus was? Why might bread be so important in the stories of Jesus? In what ways will you share the “house of bread” with others this week?

*Prayer: Bread of Heaven, remind us again of your presence in the ordinary, everyday moments of our lives. Amen.*

### **Tuesday: Read Exodus 16:2-15**

Battered by hunger and baked by the hot desert sun, the Israelites' memories begin to play tricks on them. As theologian Scott Hoezee notes, in their minds, Egypt's “house of bondage and land of death” turns into some kind of Sandals Resort. The Nile River, once full of their dead babies, has become cool and sparkling in their minds. While Egypt was the place where the Israelites were so exhausted, they hardly had the energy to eat, now it's remembered as the land of never-ending all-you-can-eat buffets. Yet are we really so different than the Israelites? How often do God's people murmur something like, “If only we were back in the good old days when... ..”, “If only we could go back to the time where... ..” Our memories can play tricks on us, and we often look back with rose-colored glasses. So, the Israelites want God to rewind history and

return them to their “home” in Egypt. God, however, doesn’t give Israel what she prays for. After all, God doesn’t always give God’s people what they ask for. Instead, the Lord graciously gives Israel what she *needs*. God, after all, always gives God’s children what we need. So, God doesn’t send Israel on a return trip to what was, but instead invites them to experience something new. Food for the body, but even more importantly nourishment for the soul. Consider a time when God provided what you needed—rather than what you wanted. What was your response? In what ways did God offer something you weren’t expecting? Where might God be inviting you to let go of your past in order to embrace something new? How will you share what God provides with others so they can move forward?

*Prayer: Lord, give us what we need, provision for today, and help us to be content in this moment. Amen.*

### **Wednesday: Read Luke 5:27-32**

Jesus turned the world upside-down sitting around a table. The simple act of sitting down together to eat was an act fraught with social and religious implications. Ideas about nationality, gender, class and religious purity were all perpetuated around the table. But then Jesus comes along eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. Christ’s table turned these norms on their heads and changed everything, much like Levi’s encounter with Christ changed his life forever. In Christ, we see the table become a place of welcome, a place of acceptance, a place of connection. And no matter who we are, the table challenges and changes us, calling us into deeper relationship with God, yes, but also into deeper relationship with one another. Recall a moment when you’ve eaten with someone unexpected or undesirable. What happened? How did you practice compassion and hospitality? In what ways was God present? How will you set a table of welcome for others today, inviting them into deeper relationship?

*Prayer: Ever-present God, be with us around our tables today, may we offer and experience your grace with one another. Amen.*

### **Thursday: Read John 21:1-14**

What can you do at a time like this? There is no point sitting around miserable, so Peter says, “I’m going fishing.” “Yep. What’s the point of sitting around? We’ll come with you.” One has to wonder if they sat there silently. Listening to the lapping of the water against the side of the boat. The flapping of the sails. The cries of the seagulls. Wondering if the pain would ever subside. They failed him. How could they have failed him? After all he’d done for them. And, as if things weren’t bad enough, the disciples had been fishing for hours and they hadn’t caught a thing. Nothing. Nada. It’s as if they couldn’t even fish anymore. The one thing they had to fall back on, and even that proved to be out of their reach. Then a man, someone they didn’t recognize, called out asking the age-old question between fishermen; “caught anything?” No, “Try the other side. The right side.” the man suggests. Why not? What could it hurt? And so, the disciples do as the man suggests, and the net immediately fills with fish. More than they could haul into the boat. In that moment they knew. It was him. Was it really him? I mean, could it actually be him? Was he really back? The disciples, wrestling their miraculous catch, and steering their boat, make their way back to the shore. When

they arrive, the Messiah is cooking them breakfast. Because of course he is. Bread. Fish. Food. Belonging. This is Jesus. When have you found yourself in the shadowy place of fear or uncertainty the disciples seem to be in at the beginning of the story? How were you led out of it, or might you still be there? In these moments where do you find hope? How will you help others find hope and share in it today?

*Prayer: Holy One, remind me today that you are with me always. Amen.*

### **Friday: Read Matthew 14:13-21**

By now word has gotten out that this Jesus has something to offer that can't be found just anywhere. The crowds with their sick and suffering in tow catch up with him. And then they don't leave. Like an unexpected guest with no manners whatsoever, they don't leave. A handful of disciples are left to carry out the ministry of hospitality which Jesus personifies. And with the help of Jesus, they do. But how does one end up with more than what one started out with? Twelve baskets full, in fact. How does *that* happen? I don't know how it worked in the marvelous story before us now. I don't know how it is that thousands of people were fed with five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. I do know it was a story about hospitality. People were there and they needed to be fed and so those who were hosting fed their guests. I do know that Jesus was at the center of it—Jesus, who always saw people and their needs and who always found a way to meet those needs. And I do know that the story ends by reminding us that they wound up with a whole lot more than what the disciples first placed in Jesus' hands. There is abundance here which I certainly could not have envisioned all on my own. Indeed, even when we cannot yet see the 'ending,' I wonder if this sort of hospitality might just find us able to 'feed' a whole lot more people than we ever have before. Who might Jesus be calling us as a community to 'feed?' What might that look like in your life? When have you seen God provide more than you expected?

*Prayer: Welcoming God, show us the way of abundance as we share the food you offer. Amen.*

### **Saturday: Read Acts 27:33-37**

Take. Bless. Break. Give. The four-fold action of the Eucharist (Communion) we see in this story is, in fact, a pattern for life. Beginning with acceptance, receive what is offered and embrace the gifts of God which are blessing. In Hebrew tradition to bless something is to give thanks for it. Whenever anything is received with thanksgiving, it is blessed. It is consecrated. It is holy. And the word *sacrifice* literally means ‘to make holy’—from *sacra* (sacred rites) and *facere* (to do, to perform, to make). We know what it is to be broken, to experience pain, struggle, grief. Just as we experience our own brokenness, the bread *must* be broken to be shared. And then we give, of ourselves, of the bread, of Christ, so that the world might know hope and love and grace. It is astounding how these verbs of the table continue to shape us each week in our own journey with God. Again, and again, throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus teaching us this rhythm of life around the table: Feeding the 5000 (Mt 14:19, Lk 9:16, Mk 6:41), The Last Supper (Mt 26:26, Mk 14:22, Lk 22:19), Emmaus (Lk 24:30), Paul does the same in this story (v. 33) and so do we. How has your life been shaped by these verbs in the holy practice of communion? How has the rhythm of the table and the practice of

communion drawn you deeper into the grace of Jesus? How might you invite another to share in and give thanks for the blessings of God?

*Prayer: Bread of Life, May I take, bless, break, and give my life for the love of God and the love of others. Amen.*