

## **Read Through the Bible**

Week 8, February 22-27

Readings: Numbers 5-20 and Mark 4-7:13

### **Introduction to Numbers**

**by Eugene Peterson, *The Message***

Becoming a truly human community is a long, complex, messy business. Simply growing up as a man or woman demands all the wisdom and patience and courage that we can muster. But growing up with others, parents and siblings and neighbors, to say nothing of odd strangers and mean enemies, immensely complicates the growing up.

The book of Numbers plunges us into the mess of growing up. The pages in this section of the biblical story give us a realistic feel for what is involved in being included in the people of God, which is to say, a human community that honors God, lives out love and justice in daily affairs, learns how to deal with sin in oneself and others, and follows God's commands into a future of blessing. And all this without illusions.

Many of us fondle a romanticized spirituality in our imaginations. The "God's in his heaven/all's right with the world" sort of thing. When things don't go "right" we blame others or ourselves, muddle through as best we can, often with considerable crankiness, and wish that we had been born at a different time—"Bible times" maybe!—when living a holy life was so much easier. That's odd because the Bible, our primary text for showing us what it means to be a human being created by God and called to a life of obedient faith and sacrificial love, nowhere suggests that life is simple or even "natural." We need a lot of help.

We need organizational help. When people live together in community, jobs have to be assigned, leaders appointed, inventories kept. Counting and list-making and rosters are as much a part of being a community of God as prayer and instruction and justice. Accurate arithmetic is an aspect of becoming a people of God.

And we need relational help. The people who find themselves called and led and commanded by God find themselves in the company of men and women who sin a lot—quarrel, bicker, grumble, rebel, fornicate, steal—you name it, we do it. We need help in getting along with each other. Wise discipline is required in becoming a people of God.

It follows that counting and quarreling take up considerable space in the book of Numbers. Because they also continue to be unavoidable aspects of our becoming the people of God, this book is essential in training our imaginations to take in some of these less-than-romantic details by which we are formed into the people of God.

### ***Reflections and Questions for Thought***

**By Beverly Houston**

*Thoughts from this week's readings:*

All of the bible is God's word and is relevant to us today, but we may wonder about such books as Numbers. It seems that the detailed instructions to the Jews are not of much interest to us now, but there are lessons we can learn, as you would expect. In the Message Bible's introduction to Numbers, Eugene Peterson says that Numbers is about a people

becoming a community – it is a long, complex and messy business. Growing up is hard, and growing up with family and strangers is more so. It requires wisdom and courage. Numbers plunges us into the mess of growing up and we see the grumbling, complaining people. Moses asks and pleads with God for forgiveness and mercy. We see that God's judgment, often swift and brutal, is followed by forgiveness and grace given to a remnant group that repents and follows him...if only for a time. Sometimes this judgment is against individuals / groups or the whole community as when they refused to trust God to bring them safely to the promised land of Canaan. God is all powerful.

What I saw in these chapters is that we are not so different today. We whine about our circumstances, complain about the economy, our bosses, community and national leaders, things that aren't "fair" or that it was better before \_\_\_\_\_, you can fill in the blank. But is God testing us as the early Jews were tested? Do we see the hand of God giving us what we need for today? Our manna? Maybe it is not the meat and fish we want or had before, but he meets our needs if not our wants.

Do we see God as too weak and small to trust with the big issues, like the people of Israel who said "no" to going to battle to win the Promised Land? Do we tell God we know what is best and we'll take it from here, thank you just the same? OR do we turn our issues over to God and ask his help and direction – then have the courage to follow where he leads us?

In Mark I saw examples of the power of God come down to earth. Jesus brings God's power to earth and demonstrates who he is by performing miracles and healings. He tells us stories of everyday things to help us understand. In these chapters he cast out a legion of demons into 2000 pigs, from one man, raised the daughter of another man, from the dead. He fed 5000 people with two fish and a few loaves of bread and had left-overs. He healed a woman who just touched his garment and many others who did the same. The disciples saw all of this power day by day, yet when he came to them walking on the water at night and calming storms, they said "Who is this?" After all they experienced with him they still were having trouble believing he was God on earth and walking at their side.

Do we see God walking on our side? Do you see him doing countless things for you every day? Think of the things that didn't happen to you today (there is no such thing as luck).

Do you see Christ at work in your life today?

What stories do you have of things he has done for you or things that did not happen to you...

Is your God big enough to handle all of your issues? To answer BHAPS?