



# still waters

home church studies

## Psalm 119.1-8

[Worship]

1 Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. 2 Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, 3 who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways. 4 You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. 5 O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! 6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. 7 I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances. 8 I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me.

### Consider:

[Words]

Addressing the church in Corinth, Paul notes it is riven with a quarrelsome spirit. It sounds like our church now or like our society with its divisive ideologies in which each party seeks domination. Paul reminds his congregation that they are all in it together, that all belong to Christ, and none has a monopoly on truth and right.

The way beyond such contentiousness, these readings suggest, is to share in a common obedience to the commandments of God so that we are pushed beyond our own interests. In a covenantal context, obedience moves beyond party, sect, and ideology to the larger purposes of God. Psalm 119 is an extended meditation on Torah obedience, beginning with the double affirmation of “happy” (verses 1-2). The psalm asserts that obedience to God’s Torah is the only route to well-being. This is in contrast to a wayward self-assertiveness that imagines it is accountable to none. We have ample evidence that a life focused on self-security and self-advancement does not end in peaceable joy, but instead in a scurry of endless anxiety.

Deuteronomy sets the either/or choice of willing obedience or willful autonomy most clearly. In the teaching of Jesus, the either/or nature of the choice is intensified because he takes the Torah commandments with deep seriousness and pushes them to even more stringent requirements. His teaching in Matthew concerns the prohibitions against murder (verse 21), adultery (verse 27), divorce (verse 31), and false swearing (verse 33); three of which are from the Ten

Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6–21). Jesus turns the prohibitions of Sinai to a strategy for living alternatively in the world.

These readings join issue with the common propaganda of consumerism and the market ideology that proposes a life of unfettered freedom with endless unencumbered choices. Biblical faith knows better than that. It knows that such undisciplined self-preoccupation will come to no good end. That is why the church sings, “Make me captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.” – Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture]

## Matthew 5.21-37

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. 33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

*Reread*

**Deuteronomy 30.15-20 & 1 Corinthians 3.1-9**