Biblical selections: Sabbath, Sabbatical, and Jubilee

(Except where otherwise mentioned, source is New English Bible)

RSV = Revised Standard Version
NBE = Nueva Biblia Española

Sabbath (Shabbat): every 7th day

Exodus 23: 12
For six days you may do your work, but on the seventh day you shall abstain from work, so that your ox and your ass may rest, and your home-born slave [servant] and the alien may refresh themselves.

Deuteronomy 5: 14-15
But the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; that day you shall not do any work, neither you, your son or your daughter, your slave or your slave-girl, your ox, your ass, or any of your cattle, nor the alien within your gates, so that your slaves and slave-girls may rest as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt…

Sabbatical: every 7th year

Exodus 23: 10-11
For six years you may sow your land and gather its produce; but in the seventh year you shall let it lie fallow and leave it alone. It shall provide food for the poor of your people, and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard and your olive-grove.

Leviticus 25: 3-4, 6-7
For six years you may sow your fields and for six years prune your vineyards and gather the harvest, but in the seventh year the land shall keep a sabbath of sacred rest, a sabbath to the LORD…Yet what the land itself produces in the Sabbath year shall be food for you, for your male and female slaves [servants], for your hired man, and for the stranger lodging under your roof, for your cattle and for the wild animals in your country.

Deuteronomy 24: 19-21
When you reap the harvest in your field and forget a swathe, do not go back to pick it up; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow…When you beat your olive-trees, do not strip them afterwards; what is left shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes from the vineyard, do not glean afterwards; what is left shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow…

Deuteronomy 23: 24-25
When you go into another man’s vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you wish to satisfy your hunger, but you may not put any into your basket. When you go into another man’s standing corn, you may pluck ears to rub into your hands, but you may not put a sickle to his standing corn.

Deuteronomy 15: 1-5

At the end of every seventh year you shall make a remission of debts. This is how the remission shall be made: everyone who holds a pledge shall remit the pledge of anyone indebted to him. He shall not press a fellow-countryman for repayment, for the LORD’s year of remission has been declared. You may press foreigners; but if it is a fellow-countryman that holds anything of yours, you must remit all claim upon it. There will never be any poor among you if only you obey the LORD your God by carefully keeping these commandments which I lay upon you this day; …

Deuteronomy 15: 7-11

When one of your fellow-countrymen…becomes poor, do not be hard-hearted or close-fisted with your countryman in his need. Be open-handed towards him and lend him on pledge as much as he needs. See that you do not harbor iniquitous thoughts when you find that the seventh year, the year of remission, is near, and look askance at your needy countryman and give him nothing. If you do, he will appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give freely to him and do not begrudge him your bounty, because it is for this very bounty that the LORD your God will bless you in everything that you do or undertake. The poor will always be with you in the land, and for that reason I command you to be open-handed with your countrymen, both poor and distressed, in your own land.

Deuteronomy 23: 19-20

You shall not charge interest on anything on anything you lend to a fellow-countryman, money or food or anything else on which interest can be charged. You may charge interest on a loan to a foreigner but not on a loan to a fellow-countryman…

Deuteronomy 24: 6

No man shall take millstones [means of production], or even the upper one alone, in pledge; that would be taking a life in pledge.

Deuteronomy 15: 12-15

When a fellow-Hebrew, man or woman, sells himself to you as a slave, he shall serve you for six years and in the seventh year you shall set him free. But when you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed. Give to him lavishly from your flock, from your threshing-floor and your wine-press. Be generous to him, because the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you; that is why I am giving you this command today.

[Deuteronomy 15: 16-17—slaves content as slaves to have ears pierced, becoming slaves for life]

Deuteronomy 23: 15

You shall not surrender to his master a slave who has taken refuge with you. Let him stay with you anywhere he chooses in any of your settlements, wherever suits him best; you shall not force him.
**Jubilee: every 50th (7x7 + 1) year**

Leviticus 25: 8-10

You shall count seven sabbaths of years, forty-nine years, and in the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, on the Day of Atonement, you shall sound the ram’s horn [“yohbel” in Hebrew] round. You shall send it through all your land to sound a blast, and so you shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberation in the land for all its inhabitants.

**Original egalitarian allocation of land**

Numbers 33: 53-54

You must take possession of the land and settle there, for to you I have given the land to occupy. You must divide it by lot among your families, each taking its own territory, the large family a large territory and the small family a small. It shall be assigned to them according to the fall of the lot, each tribe and family taking its own territory.

**Land held in trusteeship**

Leviticus 25: 23-28

No land shall be sold outright, because the land is mine, and you are coming into it as aliens and settlers. Throughout the whole land of your patrimony, you shall allow land which has been sold to be redeemed. When one of you is reduced to poverty and sells part of his patrimony, his next-of-kin who has the duty of redemption shall come and redeem what his kinsman has sold. When a man has no such next-of-kin and himself becomes able to afford its redemption, he shall take into account the years since the sale and pay the purchaser the balance up to the jubilee. Then he may return to his patrimony. But if the man cannot afford to buy back the property, it shall remain in the hands of the purchaser till the year of the jubilee. It shall then revert to the original owner, and he shall return to his patrimony.

Leviticus 25: 35-36

When your brother-Israelite is reduced to poverty and cannot support himself in the community, you shall assist him as you would an alien or a stranger, and he shall live with you. You shall not charge him interest on a loan, either by deducting it in advance from the capital sum, or by adding it on repayment.

**“Every man under his own vine and fig-tree”**

1 Kings 4: 25 (associated with peace)

Isaiah 36: 16

“you shall each eat the fruit of his own vine and his own fig-tree, and drink the water of his own cistern”

Isaiah 65: 21-22 (in post-Babylonian exile setting)

Men shall build houses and live to inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit; they shall not build for others to inhabit nor plant for others to eat. My people shall live the long life of a tree, and my chosen shall enjoy the fruit of their labor.
Micah 4: 2-4

For instruction issues from Zion, and out of Jerusalem comes the word of the LORD; he will be judge between many peoples and arbiter among mighty nations afar. [They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks (RSV)]; nation shall not lift sword against nation nor ever again be trained for war, and each man shall dwell under his own vine, under his own fig-tree, undisturbed.

Zechariah 3: 9-10

In one day I will wipe away the guilt of the land. On that day, says the LORD of Hosts, you shall all of you invite one another to come and sit each under his vine and his fig tree.

1 Kings 21: 1-3, 11-14, 16-19, 23

Naboth of Jezreel had a vineyard near the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. One day Ahab made a proposal to Naboth: “Your vineyard is close to my palace; I will give you a better vineyard in exchange for it or, if you prefer, its value in silver.” But Naboth answered, “The LORD forbid that I should let you have land which has always been in my family.” So Ahab went home sullen and angry because Naboth would not let him have his ancestral land…So the elders and notables of Naboth’s city, who sat with him in council, carried out the instruction Jezebel had sent them in her letter: they proclaimed a fast and gave Naboth the seat of honor, and these two scoundrels came in, sat opposite him and charged him publicly with cursing God and the king. Then they took him outside the city and stoned him, and sent word to Jezebel that Naboth had been stoned to death…When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went to the vineyard to take possession. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: “Go at once to Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; you will find him in Naboth’s vineyard, where he has gone to take possession. Say to him, ‘This is the word of the LORD: Have you killed your man, and taken his land as well?’ Say to him, ‘This is the word of the LORD: Where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, there dogs shall lick your blood’”…And the LORD went on to say of Jezebel, “Jezebel shall be eaten by dogs by the rampart of Jezreel.”

Covenant is not too remote for implementation in daily life

Deuteronomy 30: 11-14

“The commandment that I lay on you this day is not too difficult for you, it is not too remote. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘who will go up to heaven for us to fetch it and tell it to us, so that we can keep it?’…It is a thing very near to you, upon your lips and in your heart ready to be kept.”

Examples of implementation

2 Chronicles 28: 8-15

A prophet of the LORD was there, Oded by name; he went out to meet the army as it returned to Samaria, and said to them, “It is because the LORD the God of your fathers is angry with Judah that he has given them into your power…Now you propose to force the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, into slavery. Are not you also guilty men before the LORD your God? Now listen to me. Send back those you have taken captive from your kinsmen, for the anger of the LORD is roused against you”…So the armed men left the captives and the spoil with the officers and the
assembled people. The captives were put in charge of men nominated for this duty, who found clothes from the spoil for all who were naked. They clothed them and shod them, gave them food and drink, and anointed them; those who were tottering from exhaustion they conveyed on the backs of asses, and so brought them to their kinsmen in Jericho, in the Vale of Palm trees. Then they themselves returned to Samaria.

Nehemiah 5

There came a time when the common people, both men and women, raised a great outcry against their fellow-Jews. Some complained that they were giving their sons and daughters as pledges for food to keep themselves alive; others that they were mortgaging their fields, vineyards, and houses to buy corn in the famine; others again that they were borrowing money on their fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax. “But,” they said, “our bodily needs are the same as other people’s, our children are as good as theirs; yet here we are, forcing our sons and daughters to become slaves. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, and there is nothing we can do, because our fields and vineyards now belong to others.” I was very angry when I heard their outcry and the story they told. I mastered my feelings and reasoned with the nobles and magistrates. I said to them, “You are holding your fellow-Jews as pledges for debt.” I rebuked them severely and said, “As far as we have been able, we have bought back our fellow-Jews who had been sold to other nations; but you are now selling your own fellow-countrymen, and they will have to be bought back by us!” They were silent and had not a word to say. I went on, “What you are doing is wrong. You ought to live so much in the fear of God that you are above reproach in the eyes of the nations who are our enemies. Speaking for myself, I and my kinsmen and the men under me are advancing them money and corn. Let us give up this taking of persons as pledges for debt. Give back today to your debtors their fields and vineyards, their olive-trees and houses, as well as the income in money, and in corn, new wine, and oil.” “We will give them back,” they promised, “and Exact nothing more. We will do what you say.” So, summoning the priests, I put the offenders on oath to do as they had promised. Then I shook out the fold of my robe and said, “So may God shake out from his house and from his property every man who does not fulfill this promise. May he be shaken out like this and emptied!” And all the assembled people said “Amen” and praised the LORD. And they did as they promised. Moreover, from the time when I was appointed governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, a period of twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen drew the governor’s allowance of food. Former governors had laid a heavy burden on the people, exacting from them a daily toll of bread and wine to the value of forty shekels of silver. Further, the men under them had tyrannized over the people; but, for fear of God, I did not behave like this. I also put all my energy into the work on this wall, and I acquired no land; and all my men were gathered there for the work.

Nehemiah 9 [disaster has followed nonfulfillment of covenant], 9: 38 [recommitment to covenant], 13: 15-22 [strict commitment to sabbath], 10: 31 [restoration of sabbatical]

We will forgo the crops of the seventh year and release every person still held as a pledge for debt.

PSALM 37 [1, 5, 10-11, 14-17, 21, 29-31]

Do not strive to outdo the evildoers or emulate those who do wrong. For like grass they soon wither, and fade like the green of spring…. Commit your life to the LORD; trust in him and he will act…. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; look well, and you will find their place is empty. But the humble shall possess the land and enjoy
untold prosperity…. The wicked have drawn their swords and strung their bows to bring low the poor and needy and to slaughter honest men. Their swords shall pierce their own hearts and their bows be broken. Better is the little the righteous has than the great wealth of the mighty. For the strong arm of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous…. The wicked man borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is a generous giver…. The righteous shall possess the land and shall live there at peace forever. The righteous man utters words of wisdom and justice is always on his lips. The law of his God is in his heart, his steps do not falter….

The prophets (failure of Israel to live by the Covenant, and extension of the Covenant)

Isaiah 5: 8-9 [follows parable of the vineyard: looked for justice and found it denied]

Shame on you! you who add house to house and join field to field, until not an acre remains, and you are left to dwell alone in the land. The LORD of Hosts has sworn in my hearing: Many houses shall go to ruin, fine large houses shall be uninhabited.

Micah 2: 1-5

[Woe to (RSV)] those who lie in bed planning evil and wicked deeds and rise at daybreak to do them, knowing that they have the power! They covet land and take it by force; if they want a house they seize it; they rob a man of his home and steal every man’s inheritance. Therefore these are the words of the LORD: [Behold (RSV)], for this whole brood I am planning disaster, whose yoke you cannot shake from your necks and walk upright; it shall be your hour of disaster. On that day they shall take up a [taunt song (RSV)] about you and raise a lament thrice told, saying “We are utterly despoiled: the land of the LORD’s people changes hands; [how he removes it from me! Among the rebellious he divides our fields” (RSV).] Therefore there shall be no one to assign to you any portion by lot in the LORD’s assembly.

Habakkuk 2: 6-17

Woe betide you who heap up wealth that is not yours and enrich yourself with goods taken in pledge! Will not your creditors suddenly start up, will not all awake who would shake you till you are empty, and will you not fall a victim to them? [Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of men and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell therein (RSV)]. Woe betide you who seek unjust gain for your house, to build your nest on a height, to save yourself [from the reach of harm! (RSV)] Your schemes to overthrow many nations will bring dishonor to your house and put your life in jeopardy. The very stones will cry out from the wall, and from the timbers a beam will answer them. Woe betide you who have built a town with bloodshed and founded a city on fraud, so that nations toil for a pittance, and peoples weary themselves for a mere nothing!…The violence done to Lebanon shall sweep over you, the havoc done to its beasts shall break your own spirit, because of bloodshed and violence done in the land, to the city and all its inhabitants.

Isaiah 3: 14-15

The LORD opens the indictment against the elders of his people and their officers: You have ravaged the vineyard, and the spoils of the poor are in your houses. Is it nothing to you that you crush my people and grind the faces of the poor?

Isaiah 26: 5-6
He has brought low all who dwell high in a towering city [Babylon]; he levels it to the ground and lays it in the dust, that the oppressed and the poor may tread it underfoot.

Zechariah 7: 8-11 [compassion for the vulnerable: poor, alien, orphan, widow]

These are the words of the LORD of Hosts: Administer true justice, show loyalty and compassion to one another, do not oppress the orphan an the widow, the alien and the poor, do not contrive any evil one against another. But they refused to listen, they turned their backs on me in defiance, they stopped their ears and would not hear.

Isaiah 58: 5-7 [precursor of Matthew 25]

Is it a fast like this that I require, a day of mortification such as this, that a man should bow his head like a bulrush and make his bed on sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this what I require of you as a fast: to loose the fetters of injustice, to untie the knots of the yoke, to snap every yoke and set free those who have been crushed? Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked when you meet them and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?

Isaiah 66: 2-4 [extension of ethical sensitivity to non-human beings]

The man I look to is a man [humble and contrite in spirit (RSV)], who reveres my words. But [he who slaughters an ox is like he who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like him who breaks a dog’s neck; he who presents a cereal offering, like him who offers swine’s blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like him who blesses an idol (RSV).] All these are the chosen practices of men who revel in their loathsome rites. [best translation NEB]

Hosea 2: 18

Then I will make a covenant on behalf of Israel with the wild beasts, the birds of the air, and the things that creep on the earth, and I will break bow and sword and weapon of war and sweep them off the earth, so that all living creatures may lie down without fear.

Isaiah 58: 13-14 [avoidance of selfishness & exploitation, not exertion, is aim of sabbath]

If you cease to tread the sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the sabbath a day of joy and the LORD’s holy day a day to be honored, if you honor it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs, then you shall find your joy in the LORD…

Amos 8: 4-7

Listen to this, you who grind the destitute and plunder the humble, you who say, “When will the new moon be over so that we may sell corn? When will the sabbath be past so that we may open our wheat again, giving short measure in the bushel and taking overweight in the silver, tilting the scales fraudulently, and selling the dust of the wheat; that we may buy the poor for silver and the destitute for a pair of shoes?” The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: I will never forget any of their doings.

Jeremiah 34: 8-22

…Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim an act of freedom for the slaves. All who had Hebrew slaves, male or female, were to set them free; they were not to keep their fellow Judeans in servitude. All the officers and people, having made this covenant to set free their slaves… fulfilled its terms and let
them go. Afterwards, however, they changed their minds and forced back again into slavery the men and women they had freed. Then this word came from the LORD to Jeremiah: …I made a covenant with your forefathers on the day that I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. These were its terms: “within seven years each of you shall set free any Hebrew who has sold himself to you as a slave and has served you for six years; you shall set him free”…After you had proclaimed an act of freedom, a deliverance for your kinsmen and your neighbors, you did not obey me; so I will proclaim a deliverance for you, says the LORD, a deliverance over to sword, to pestilence, and to famine, and I will make you repugnant to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Ezekiel 47: 13-23 [in the resettlement following Babylonian exile]

These are the words of the Lord GOD: …You shall distribute this land among the tribes of Israel and assign it by lot as a patrimony for yourselves and for any aliens living in your midst who leave sons among you. They shall be treated as native-born in Israel and with you shall receive a patrimony by lot among the tribes of Israel. You shall give the alien his patrimony with the tribe in which he is living. This is the very word of the Lord GOD.

New Testament

Jesus affirms the Law and the Prophets

Matthew 5: 17-20

Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law before all that it stands for is achieved. If any man therefore sets aside even the least of the Law’s demands, and teaches others to do the same, he will have the lowest place in the kingdom of Heaven, whereas anyone who keeps the Law, and teaches others so, will stand high in the kingdom of Heaven. I tell you, unless you show yourselves far better men than the Pharisees and the doctors of the law, you can never enter the kingdom of Heaven.

But in such a way as to affirm and extend its basic ethical precepts

Matthew 13: 52

When a teacher of the law has become a learner in the kingdom of Heaven, he is like a householder who can produce from his store both the new and the old.

Matthew 15: 1-20

Then Jesus was approached by a group of Pharisees and lawyers from Jerusalem, with the question: “Why do your disciples break the ancient tradition? They do not wash their hands before meals.” He answered them: “And what of you? Why do you break God’s commandment in the interest of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’…But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Anything of mine which might have been used for your benefit is set apart for God,’ then he must not honor his father or his mother.’ You have made God’s law null and void out of respect for your tradition. What hypocrisy! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:
‘This people pays me lip-service, but their heart is far from me; their worship of me is in vain, for they teach as doctrines the commandments of men.’”


At daybreak he appeared again in the temple, and all the people gathered round him. He had taken his seat and was engaged in teaching them when the doctors of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught committing adultery. Making her stand out in the middle they said to him, “Master, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. In the Law Moses has laid down that such women are to be stoned. What do you say about it?” They put the question as a test, hoping to frame a charge against him….When they continued to press their question he sat up straight and said, [“Let whoever is without sin among you (my adaptation of RSV)] throw the first stone”…. When they heard what he said, one by one they went away, the eldest first; and Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. Jesus again sat up and said to the woman, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She answered, “No one, sir.” Jesus said, “Nor do I condemn you. You may go; do not sin again.”

Matthew 22: 34-40

Hearing that he had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees met together; and one of their number tested him with this question: “Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,’ that is the greatest commandment. It comes first. The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Everything in the Law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments.”


If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. Again, if you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do as much. And if you lend only where you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to each other to be repaid in full. But you must love your enemies and do good; and lend without expecting any return; and you will have a rich reward: you will be sons of the Most High, because he himself is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.

Matthew 23: 23-24

Alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin; but you have overlooked the weightier demands of the Law, justice, mercy, and good faith. It is these you should have practiced, without neglecting the others. Blind guides! You strain off a midge, yet gulp down a camel!

Matthew 25: 31-46 [RSV]

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats…Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, O blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?” And
the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”…Then they also will answer, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?” Then he will answer to them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.” And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Hebrews 13: 1-3

Never cease to love your Christian [brothers and sisters (my adaptation RSV)]. Remember to show hospitality. There are some who, by doing so, have entertained angels without knowing it. [Remember those in prison as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body (RSV)].

Sabbath for basic human needs, for doing good

Matthew 12: 1-14

Once about that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the sabbath; and his disciples, feeling hungry, began to pluck some ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees noticed this, and said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing something which is forbidden on the sabbath.” He answered, “Have you not read what David did when he and his men were hungry? He went into the house of God and ate the sacred bread, though neither he nor his men had a right to eat it, but only the priests. Or have you not read in the Law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and it is not held against them? I tell you, there is something greater than the temple here. If you had known what that text means, ‘I require mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is sovereign over the sabbath.” He went on to another place, and entered the synagogue. A man was there with a withered arm, and they asked Jesus, “Is it permitted to heal on the sabbath?” (They wanted to frame a charge against him.) But he said to them, “Suppose you had one sheep, which fell into the ditch on the sabbath; is there one of you who would not catch hold of it and lift it out? And surely a man is worth far more than a sheep! It is therefore permitted to do good on the sabbath.” Turning to the man he said, “Stretch out your arm.” He stretched it out, and it was made sound again like the other. But the Pharisees, on leaving the synagogue, laid a plot to do away with him.

Mark 2: 27

He also said to them, “The sabbath was made for the sake of man and not man for the sabbath…”

Matthew 5: 42

Give when you are asked to give; and do not turn your back on a man who wants to borrow.

Jesus initiates public ministry with Isaiah’s proclamation of jubilee

Luke 4: 16-30 (RSV)

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,
The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

**The LORD’s prayer**

Matthew 6: 9-13 (RSV)

Pray then like this:

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 debts,
As we have also forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

**Mary’s Magnificat**

Luke 1: 52-53 (RSV)

he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.

**John the Baptist**

Luke 3: 1-5 (RSV)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturae and Trachonitis, and Lysanias Tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet [Isaiah 40],

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be brought low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways shall be made smooth;
[and all mankind shall see God’s deliverance (NEB)].”

**blessings and woes**

Luke 6: 20-26 (RSV)

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.
Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.
Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man!
Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.
But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger.
Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.
Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

**Book of James**

James 1: 9-11

The brother in humble circumstances may well be proud that God lifts him up; and the wealthy brother must find his pride in being brought low. For the rich man will disappear like the flower of the field; once the sun is up with its scorching heat the flower withers, its petals fall, and what was lovely to look at is lost forever. So shall the rich man wither away [in the midst (RSV)] of his [enterprises (NBE)].

James 2: 5, 6

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he has promised to those who love him? … Moreover, are not the rich your oppressors?

James 5: 1-6

Next a word to you who have great possessions. Weep and wail over the miserable fate descending on you. Your riches have rotted; your fine clothes are moth-eaten; your silver and gold have rusted away, and their very rust will be evidence against you and consume your flesh like fire. You have piled up wealth in an age that is near its close. The wages you never paid to the men who mowed your fields are loud against you, and the outcry of the reapers has reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts. You have lived on earth in wanton luxury, fattening yourselves like cattle—and the day for slaughter has come. You have condemned the innocent and murdered him; he offers no resistance [being defenseless].

**Pentecost (50th day after Passover, as Jubilee is 50th year)**

**Universalization of covenant: translation into other languages**

Acts 2: 1-7
While the day of Pentecost was running its course they were all together in one place, when suddenly there came from the sky a noise like that of a strong driving wind, which filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire, dispersed among them and resting on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them the power of utterance. Now there were living in Jerusalem devout Jews drawn from every nation under heaven; and at this sound the crowd gathered, all bewildered because each one heard his own language spoken. They were amazed and in their astonishment exclaimed, “Why, they are all Galileans, are they not, these men who are speaking?”

**Covenant applies to all equally**


I will pour out on everyone a portion of my spirit; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams [Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream”]. Yes, I will endue even my slaves, both men and women, with a portion of my spirit, and they shall prophesy [as happened with Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman].

Acts 10: 28-29 [Peter to Cornelius, the good Roman centurion]

I need not tell you that a Jew is forbidden by his religion to visit or associate with a man of another race; yet God has shown me clearly that I must not call any man profane or unclean.

Acts 10: 34-35 [Peter]

I now see how true it is that God has no favorites, but that in every nation the man who is God-fearing and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Galatians 3: 26-28

For through faith you are all sons of God in union with Christ Jesus. Baptized into union with him, you have all put on Christ as a garment. There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, for you are all [one in (RSV)] Christ Jesus.

Philemon 8-21 [regarding runaway slave]

… although in Christ I might make bold to point out your duty, yet, because of that same love, I would rather appeal to you….I mean Onesimus, once so little use to you, but now useful indeed, both to you and to me. I am sending him back to you, and in doing so I am sending a part of myself…. But I would rather do nothing without your consent, so that your kindness may be a matter not of compulsion, but of your own free will. For perhaps this is why you lost him for a time, that you might have him back for good, no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave—as a dear brother, very dear indeed to me and how much dearer to you, both as man and as Christian. If, then, you count me partner in the faith, welcome him as you would welcome me. And if he has done you any wrong or is in your debt, put that down to my account. Here is my signature, PAUL; I undertake to repay—not to mention that you owe your very self to me as well. Now brother, as a Christian, be generous with me, and relieve my anxiety; we are both in Christ!

**Entrance into covenant requires metanoia**

Acts 2: 37-38
When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the apostles, “Friends, what are we to do?” “Repent,” said Peter, “repent and be baptized [born anew], every one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.…”

Acts 3: 19

Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.

Acts 26: 19-21 [Paul, on trial before Roman authorities]

And so, King Agrippa, I did not disobey the heavenly vision. I turned first to the inhabitants of Damascus, and then to Jerusalem and all the country of Judaea, and to the Gentiles, and sounded the call to repent and turn to God, and to prove their repentance by deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to do away with me.

Christian community (*koinonia*)

Acts 2: 42-47 [to each according to need]

They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread, and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere, and many marvels and signs were brought about through the apostles. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common [Greek *koina*: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, and, breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy, as they praised God and enjoyed the favor of the whole people.

Acts 4: 31-35

When they had ended their prayer, the whole building where they were assembled rocked, and all were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. The whole body of believers was united in heart and soul. Not a man of them claimed any of his possessions as his own, but everything was held in common, while the apostles bore witness with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They were all held in high esteem; for they had never a needy person among them, because all who had property in land or houses sold it, brought the proceeds of the sale, and laid the money at the feet of the apostles; it was then distributed to any who stood in need.

Acts 5: 1-5, 7, 10, 11-12

But there was another man, called Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, who sold a property. With the full knowledge of his wife he kept back part of the purchase-money, and part he brought and laid at the apostles’ feet. Put Peter said, “Ananias, how was it that Satan so possessed your mind that you lied to the Holy Spirit, and kept back part of the price of the land? While it remained, did it not remain yours? When it was turned into money, was it not still at your own disposal? What made you think of doing this thing? You have lied not to men but to God.” When Ananias heard these words he dropped dead; and all the others who heard were awestruck….and then his wife came in….And suddenly she dropped dead at his feet….And a great awe fell upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these events; and many remarkable and wonderful things took place among the people at the hands of the apostles.
Christian community: charismas, humility, unity from diversity

Romans 12: 4-8

… do not be conceited or think too much of yourself…For just as in a single human body there are many limbs and organs, all with different functions, so all of us, united with Christ, form one body, serving individually as limbs and organs to one another. The gifts [charismas] we possess differ as they are allotted to us by God’s grace, and must be exercised accordingly: the gift of inspired utterance, for example, in proportion to a man’s faith; or the gift of administration, in administration. A teacher should employ his gift in teaching, and one who has the gift of stirring speech should use it to stir his hearers.

1 Corinthians 4: 7

Who makes you, my friend, so important? What do you possess that was not given you? If then you really received it all as a gift, why take the credit to yourself?

1 Corinthians 12

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit…. In each of us the Spirit is manifested in one particular way, for some useful purpose. One man, through the Spirit, has the gift of wise speech, while another, by the power of the same Spirit, can put the deepest knowledge into words…. another, by the one Spirit, gifts of healing…another has the gift of prophecy, and another ability to distinguish true spirits from false…But all these gifts are the work of one and the same Spirit, distributing them separately to each individual at will. For Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs, which, many as they are, together make up one body. For indeed we were all brought together in one body by baptism, in the one Spirit, whether we are Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free men, and that one Holy Spirit was poured out for all of us to drink. A body is not one single organ, but many. Suppose the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it does belong to the body none the less. Suppose the ear were to say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it does still belong to the body. If the body were all eye, how could it hear? If the body were all ear, how could it smell? … those organs of the body which seem to be more frail than others are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we regard as less honorable are treated with special honor….God has combined the various parts of the body, giving special honor to the humbler parts, so that there might be no sense of division in the body, but that all its organs might feel the same concern for one another. If one organ suffers, they all suffer together. If one flourishes, they all rejoice together.

1 Corinthians 14: 1-12

Put love first; but there are other gifts of the Spirit at which you should aim also, and above all prophecy…. The prophet is worth more than the man of ecstatic speech—unless indeed he can explain its meaning, and so help to build up the community…. what good shall I do you, unless what I say contains something by way of revelation, or enlightenment, or prophecy, or instruction? …if I do not know the meaning of the sound the speaker makes, his words will be gibberish to me, mine to him. You are, I know, eager for gifts of the Spirit; then aspire above all to excel in those which build up the church.

1 Peter 4: 8,10
Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength, because love cancels innumerable sins.... Whatever gift each of you may have received, use it in service to one another, like good stewards dispensing the grace of God in its varied forms.

**Christian community: freedom**

1 Corinthians 10: 23-24

“‘We are free to do anything,’” you say. Yes, but is everything good for us? “‘We are free to do anything,’” but does everything help the building of the community? Each of you must regard, not his own interests, but the other man’s.

Galatians 5: 13-15

You, my friends were called to be free men, only do not turn your freedom into license for your lower nature, but be servants to one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in a single commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you go on fighting one another, tooth and nail, all you can expect is mutual destruction.

**As covenant internationalized, so are jubilary obligations**

Acts 11: 28-30 [from each according to ability]

During this period some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, Agabus by name, was inspired to stand up and predict a severe and world-wide famine, which in fact occurred in the reign of Claudius. So the disciples agreed to make a contribution, each according to his means, for the relief of their fellow-Christians in Judaea. This they did, and sent it off to the elders, in the charge of Barnabas and Saul.

1 Corinthians 16: 1-3

And now about the collection in aid of God’s people: you should follow my directions to our congregations in Galatia. Every Sunday each of you is to put aside and keep by him a sum in proportion to his gains, so that there may be no collecting when I come. When I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to persons approved by you, and send them to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8: 1-8

We must tell you, friends, about the grace of generosity which God has imparted our congregations in Macedonia. The troubles they have been through have tried them hard, yet in all this they have been so exuberantly happy that from the depths of their poverty they have shown themselves lavishly open-handed. Going to the limit of their resources, as I can testify, and even beyond that limit, they begged us most insistently, and on their own initiative, to be allowed to share in this generous service to their fellow-Christians. And their giving surpassed our expectations; for they gave their very selves, offering them in the first instance to the Lord, but also, under God, to us. The upshot is that we have asked Titus, who began it all, to visit you and bring this work of generosity also to completion. You are so rich in everything—in faith, speech, knowledge, and zeal of every kind, as well as in the loving regard you have for us—surely you should show yourselves equally lavish in this generous service! This is not meant as an order; by telling you how keen others are I am putting your love to the test.

2 Corinthians 8: 11-15
… give according to your means… God accepts what a man has; he does not ask for what he has not. There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. At the moment your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality; as Scripture has it [Exodus 16: 18, the manna in the desert], “The man who got much more had no more than enough, and the man who got little did not go short.”

2 Corinthians 9: 6-7

Remember: sparse sowing, sparse reaping; sow bountifully, and you will reap bountifully. Each person should give as he has decided for himself; there should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion; God loves a cheerful giver.