



Mount Olive Advent Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The First Week of Advent (November 29, 2021-December 3, 2021)

Monday

Nehemiah 9:6-8

⁶ And Ezra said: “You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you. ⁷ You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham; ⁸ and you found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.”

If you look for the book of Nehemiah amongst the prophetic books of the Old Testament you will look in vain, for it is not among them. Nehemiah was a servant of the court in Persia during the Jews' exile there, and is credited, along with Ezra the priest, with leading the people of Israel once they returned home from exile. In the ninth chapter of the book of Nehemiah we have an account of “A National Confession”. In other words, it is the story of the whole people of Israel standing before God, confessing their sins. But notice that at this beginning of the confession the Lord God is praised. Nothing else is done except recalling the mighty works of God and giving God praise. And this hymn of praise goes on well beyond these verses. Read them for yourself. One of my seminary professors, Gerhard Forde, used to remind us that the reason we begin worship with confession is because we are coming into the presence of a holy God, and we are not holy. So perhaps the Israelites began their confession with praise as well, just to remind themselves of how majestic God is and how little they were compared with God. Perhaps our confessions could start this way as well.

Prayer

Almighty God, as we begin this new season of the Church year we give you praise. We praise you for your mighty works of creation, your compassion shown in Christ, and your abundance poured out upon us in the Holy Spirit. Grant that every day we might be found giving you praise, and in so doing, we might be caught up in joyful service in your name to all we encounter. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

I Thessalonians 5:8-11

⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

It is hard for us to imagine, but the people of Thessalonica, to whom St. Paul first wrote this letter, were living in expectation of the Lord's return *in their own lifetime*. That's right; they thought that Christ would return any day. Even so, Paul was practical in his advice to them. He knew that in their waiting they might find their faith weakening and they might become vulnerable to Satan's lies. One of Satan's favorite lies to God's people is, "You are destined for wrath. You are a sinner, and there is no mercy for you." This, ironically, comes more often to people of faith, who might actually be aware of their own sins. But Paul assures us, "You are not destined for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is a story often told of Martin Luther as he sat alone in his room in the Wartburg castle. As the story goes, Satan was tempting him to despair, to doubt his salvation, when suddenly Luther stood up and shouted, "I am baptized!" and with that, he threw his ink well at the castle wall. It is said that you can still see the stain on the wall at Wartburg castle. In any case, Luther was reiterating what St. Paul tells us here: You are destined for obtaining salvation. You have been baptized. You have been claimed by God, and nothing shall ever separate you from that love.

Prayer

God of Great Mercy, how blessed we are to be called your own. Through no merit of our own, you have claimed us as your children and even made us co-heirs with Christ of an eternal inheritance. All thanks and praise to you. Let us never doubt such a great salvation, but let us rejoice in it each day, living lives of faith and gratitude. In Jesus' name, we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Numbers 17:1-8

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²Speak to the Israelites, and get twelve staffs from them, one for each ancestral house, from all the leaders of their ancestral houses. Write each man's name on his staff, ³ and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each ancestral house. ⁴Place them in the tent of meeting before the covenant, where I meet with you. ⁵And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout; thus I will put a stop to the complaints of the Israelites that they continually make against you. ⁶Moses spoke to the Israelites; and all their leaders gave him staffs, one for each leader, according to their ancestral houses, twelve staffs; and the staff of Aaron was among theirs. ⁷So Moses placed the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the covenant. ⁸When Moses went into the tent of the covenant on the next day, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted. It put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.

Needless to say, this is a strange story. We do not generally go around choosing our leaders according to which staff sprouts. Laying that aside, what is important to know is that, just prior to this episode, there is a very serious revolt amongst God's people. The leaders of that revolt had even assembled an army of several hundred men to oppose Moses and Aaron. In short, the whole future of the nation of Israel was at stake. What this story points out is how important leadership is. We have learned this over and over through our history, and no more so than today. When wicked leaders are allowed to gain power destruction is assured. When fools are put in charge of complex systems, chaos results. When even good-hearted, but unprepared people of faith, are given responsibility far beyond their ability to handle it, things do not go well. Leadership is important. These days we need to be praying for our leaders – the leaders of our communities, our churches, our nation, and even our globe. Be assured that when we rally behind a leader who follows in the footsteps of Christ, we will be blessed.

Prayer

God of Wisdom, thank you for the example of Christ. As he led his disciples in the way of wisdom, compassion, and love, let us do so as well. Grant that those who lead and those who follow might all have the mind of Christ so that together we might find our way to your will for us all. We are in your hands, Gracious God. Hear us, we pray. In Christ's name. AMEN.

Thursday

II Peter 3:8-13

⁸ But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³ But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

This passage in the second letter of St. Peter reminds us of two things that could rightly be called “law” and “gospel”. The Law here reminds us that the day of the Lord will come. What we confess in the Apostles’ Creed, that Christ will someday come “to judge the living and the dead”, is assured. This should cause us to live with a due sense of responsibility, not allowing ourselves to be drawn into patterns of life that suggest that nothing is expected of us as people of God. As St. Peter says, we ought to be persons who lead lives of “holiness and godliness.” Having said this, the Gospel in this passage reminds us that the Lord is not “wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” It is God’s will that *all* know grace, *all* know Christ’s love, and *all* are brought to the place where they rejoice in Christ’s coming. Because of this, we have the joyful duty of proclaiming this Good News to the world. Our message is: “Christ’s love is for all! God has no favorites! Sins are forgiven. Christ lives. Rejoice in the goodness of God!” This message also has the effect of bringing us joy, for we live, confident that when Christ appears, we will receive him with joy.

Prayer

Gracious God, make us bearers of the good news. Inspire us to share your love with those around us, telling the good news that Christ has come for all. Grant us also the good sense to live lives of holiness and godliness, not presuming upon your mercy. We are your children. Guide us, we pray. In the Name of Christ. AMEN.

Friday

II Samuel 7:18-22

¹⁸ Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? ¹⁹ And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD; you have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come. May this be instruction for the people, O Lord GOD! ²⁰ And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! ²¹ Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it. ²² Therefore you are great, O LORD God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”

This passage from Second Samuel is the beginning of a prayer of thanksgiving that David offers after God’s covenant has been renewed with David’s family. God has assured him that his family would forever lie in God’s embrace, and that David’s house and kingdom would stand forever. In this promise we, Christians, hear the promise of Christ. To this great gift, David offers this prayer. Noteworthy is David’s posture before God: “Who am I to have received all this?” says David. He is incredulous that God has blessed him so. In his gratefulness, David can only refer to himself as “your servant”, again taking the posture that all that has been given him is not because of his deserving, but rather comes to him, despite his undeserving. When we too look at our blessings as people of faith, as citizens of this land, as recipients of so much abundance, David’s posture is one that commends itself to us. Certainly none of us can claim that all that we have comes to us because we deserve it. Indeed, if we are honest with ourselves we know that we often fall short in many ways of God’s will for us, and yet God has blessed us. We, too, are simply servants in the Lord’s house, recipients of God’s grace.

Prayer

We are your servants, Lord God. We are those whose only claim is that you have seen fit to call us your own and call us to tasks that give us purpose and joy. Help us to live lives of gratitude and service, always remembering that your grace is what has brought us all this abundance. We ask this in Christ’s name. AMEN.