



Mount Olive Advent Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Third Week of Advent (December 13 – 17, 2021)

Monday

Isaiah 19:19-25

¹⁹On that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the center of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. ²⁰It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior, and will defend and deliver them. ²¹The LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the LORD on that day, and will worship with sacrifice and burnt offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. ²²The LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them. ²³On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. ²⁴On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.”

This is a remarkable passage if you know anything at all about the history of Israel. Who were Israel's fiercest enemies in much of Israel's history? Egypt and Assyria; Egypt in the Exodus story, and Assyria as the nation that hauled the Israelites off into exile. Yet here, in this passage, the prophet envisions them as “a blessing in the midst of the earth.” What a reversal! I remember a set of twins I once had in a confirmation class. They were an unholy terror. They egged each other on to see which one could produce the most havoc. Those two were solely responsible for me taking a course in classroom management during my ministry. What a pair! Years after I had left the congregation where those two boys had tormented me, I happened to ask one of the secretaries at that church, “Whatever came of the Kunzer boys?” She said, “I know you will find this hard to believe, but they became leaders in our church youth group. They were some of the best and most faithful young people we ever had.” I was stunned. Yes, God does sometimes use our tormentors to bless the world. What a God we have!

Prayer

God of surprises, thank you for using all sorts of people for your glory. Forgive our small mindedness that keeps us from seeing the potential in each person. Grant us wisdom to see even our tormentors as those whom you can use for blessing in the world. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

II Peter 1:3-9

³ His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. ⁵ For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins.

These are remarkable verses. First, the writer makes clear that we have been given everything needed “for life and godliness”. Second, we are told *why* we have received these things: “so that through [the promises of God] we may escape from the corruption that is in the world... and become participants of the divine nature.” Third, the writer gives us a charge: we are to “make every effort to support our faith” with all sorts of attributes and efforts. Finally, why must we do this? Answer: so that we are not “ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It’s important to note that we are not asked to supplement our faith with all these attributes and efforts lest we lose our faith, or even lose our salvation. No, we are exhorted to these things so that we might be effective and fruitful in the ministry to which God has called us. Once again, we see that God has blessed us to be a blessing.

Prayer

God of All, your vision for the world is so much grander than ours. How often we get caught up in thinking that we are blessed for our own benefit alone. Forgive us for this small, self-centered thinking. Give us a glimpse of your vision for the world, and make us effective and fruitful servants of yours. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Luke 7: 18-23

¹⁸The disciples of John reported all these things [that Jesus had been doing] to him. So John summoned two of his disciples ¹⁹and sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” ²⁰When the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’” ²¹Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind. ²²And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. ²³And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

If you have ever been asked to be a reference for a person you know how it goes. The party that is considering hiring the person for whom you are a reference calls you: “So tell me about this person. What kind of work habits do they have? Are they reliable? Do they get along well with others? Etc., etc.” But if a prospective employer is really savvy, they won’t just ask your opinion, they will want to know about some concrete examples of behavior that that person was involved in. Going even further back, they might inquire about the track record of a person over time. That will reveal much about a person’s character. John the Baptist was asking for Jesus’ credentials. Was he the Messiah or not? Was he the One for whom they had waited or should they seek another? In answer, Jesus doesn’t produce a resume’, he simply says, “Tell John what you see. My actions will tell him what he needs to know.” Someone once asked the question, “If being a Christian was a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” I pray that for each of us there would be.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the One for whom the world has waited. You are the healer of all our ills, the wisdom for all our confusion, and the resurrected Lord over all that is dead and dying in our lives. Grant us faith to see you as Lord, and give us tongues to proclaim your deliverance to all. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

II Corinthians 8:1-7

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; ² for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints— ⁵ and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, ⁶ so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. ⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is writing to his beloved congregation in Corinth, exhorting them to take up a collection for the members of the fledgling congregation in Jerusalem who are enduring a famine. In this exhortation he lifts up another congregation in Macedonia who has been going through an unknown “severe ordeal of affliction.” Perhaps they were being persecuted, or perhaps inner strife was tearing them apart, or maybe some calamity had befallen them; we don’t know. In any case, while in the midst of this, they had given generously to provide aid to the starving saints in Jerusalem, even “begging... earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry.” This is an example to which we might aspire. How likely we are to say to ourselves, “*Someday* when all my bills are paid, when my job situation is secure, when my retirement portfolio is in better shape, etc.,etc., *then* I will give generously to those in need and to the ministry of Christ.” St. Paul shows us another way – the Macedonian way. Even in times of difficulty, be generous. God wants us to excel not only in faith and knowledge and love, but in generosity.

Prayer

Generous God, how apt we are to let fear control our giving. How apt we are to trust only in our bank account and not in your provision. Fill us with faith so that we might excel in generosity, and know the joy of living by faith. You are our source of life. Help us to trust your good will for our lives. In Jesus’ name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Amos 6:1, 4-7

Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria, the notables of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel resorts!

⁴ Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall;

⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music;

⁶ who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

The prophet Amos was not popular with the corrupt, wealthy leaders of Israel. He saw their indifference to the decline in the nation, and he called them on it. “Why are you not grieved over the ruin of Joseph?” he shouted. By Joseph he meant the nation of Israel. “How can you lounge about on your couches and eat and drink like there’s no tomorrow when people are dying in the streets?” Amos knew all too well that these leaders were in a position to help those in distress, and yet they did not raise a finger to help. We, who are in positions of wealth and access to power do well to heed this warning. How are we responding to the needs of the poor? How are we showing our care of those most vulnerable? How are we making use of our resources to bring relief to those without an advocate in our community? These are terribly important questions, for us and for those who need our aid. Amos gives a warning: “[Those rich who neglect the poor] shall be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.”

Prayer

God of Mercy and Compassion, we are sorry for the times we have not heeded your call to care for the vulnerable. We are sorry for the ways we have turned a blind eye and closed our ears to the desperate situations around us. Grant us clear vision and the will to do what we can to benefit those who suffer. Help us to discern our part in your ministry of compassion, trusting that we all have a part to play in this ministry. In the name of Jesus, we pray. AMEN.