



Monday

Psalm 147:12-20

¹² Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!

¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you.

¹⁴ He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat.

¹⁵ He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

¹⁶ He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.

¹⁷ He hurls down hail like crumbs—who can stand before his cold?

¹⁸ He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.

¹⁹ He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel.

²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances.

Praise the LORD!

One of the things that was always insisted on in our house while I was growing up was writing thank you notes. When we opened a gift at Christmas, my mother would dutifully write down what we had received and who it was from. Then, sometime shortly after Christmas, we were expected to write a thank you to Grandma and Grandpa or anyone else not in our immediate family, who had given us a gift. Psalm 147 is kind of like that. It is a thank you note to God for all the gifts that we have received from God. If you read the entire psalm you will see that there are many more gifts listed beyond the ones in these eight verses. It might be a great exercise to do this week, by yourself or with another person, to just sit down and make a list of all the gifts you have gotten from God in recent days. And perhaps you can consider writing a thank you note to God. I'll bet God likes getting thank you notes as much as you do.

Prayer

We thank you, Generous God, for gifting us with life and breath and everything we need from day to day. We thank you for the relationships we enjoy, the abilities we've been given, and the callings that are ours. Grant that we might ever be found grateful. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Acts 6:1-7

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴ while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” ⁵ What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

In the sixth chapter of Acts we have one of the first reports of dissension in the early Christian community in Jerusalem. Sure enough, as often seems to be the case, the issue began to cause a split in the community. Notice, however, how the leaders of the community handled the situation: they realized that, with the growing community, they did not have time to do the daily distribution of food as, perhaps, they had done with a smaller group of people. They needed to delegate this responsibility to others. But not to just anybody. They invited *the people* to select folks “of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” who would fulfill this task. Notice, the disciples did *not* select the persons themselves, but they trusted the people to do this, only giving some criteria for their choosing: those in good standing in the community, full of God’s Spirit and wise. This, in some ways, is how the Church continues to operate today. Pastors teach and preach and counsel and pray, while many others serve in ways needed for the well-being of the community. It may be simply the distribution of food, but wise, Spirit-filled persons, well-thought of in the community, are required. No advanced degrees are required, only a heart for God and for one another.

Prayer

We praise you, O God, for wise, compassionate, Spirit-filled persons who do the work of ministry. We praise you that you use *all* of us, in whatever ways you have gifted us, to bring the gospel to the world. Grant us faith to believe that you use each one of us, each day, to do the work of ministry. In your name, we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Proverbs 8:32-36

³² “And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways.

³³ Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. ³⁴ Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. ³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD; ³⁶ but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death.”

The person speaking in this section of Proverbs is Wisdom, often portrayed as a wise woman. She is speaking like a mother to her children. Notice how many times she urges them to listen. She insists that listening closely to her will bring blessing. Indeed she says that whoever finds wisdom finds life, and those who fail to find wisdom injure themselves. Finally, she gives a warning: “All who hate wisdom, love death.” This is a stern reminder that our choices have consequences. Almost nobody would say that they love death, and yet, Wisdom tells us, “If you hate me you are necessarily embracing your own destruction.” Today wisdom is more important than ever. With the advent of the internet, information and *misinformation*, and even purposeful *disinformation* is readily available on any subject. Wisdom, on the other hand, is even harder to come by since we have to sift through so much nonsense. We need to take heed to Wisdom’s call and be good listeners, asking God to give us the discernment we need.

Prayer

All-Wise God, grant us wisdom. Keep us from wrong paths and foolish ways. Give us wise counselors, helpful leaders, and people who will steer us in the way of life. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, the Counselor, that in all our words and deeds, we might follow in the ways of wisdom and grace. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

I Corinthians 3:10-15

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴ If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

The metaphor St. Paul is using here is one of building. He is talking specifically about the building up of the Church, the people of God. Notice that he says that the “foundation [of the Church] is Jesus Christ.” Paul was trying to deal with a division in the congregation at Corinth that had arisen because of people’s preference for a certain leader. Some church members said they belonged to Paul, and others said they belonged to another preacher named Apollos. Paul reminds them that they *all* belong to Christ, and the foundation of the Church is *not* a preacher, but Jesus. This is so important for us to remember. Jesus is our foundation, our base, and our center. Preachers come and go, but Jesus is forever. We can be free to like one preacher’s style better than another, or prefer one’s personality over another one’s, but when it really comes down to it, Jesus Christ is the *only one* who deserves our praise, our adoration, and our love.

Prayer

Thank you, Loving God, for faithful pastors, teachers, deacons and other leaders of faith. Thank you for their faithful work and witness. Grant them always your blessing. Help us keep our eyes on Jesus, as we go forward together, knowing that Jesus is our rock and our salvation. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Mark 13:32-37

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵ Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

If you were around at the turn of the century, you might remember the Y2K moment. That was the stroke of midnight when the year 2000 commenced. There was all kinds of speculation leading up to that date that the computer systems which ran our electric grid, our utilities, our government, our banking system, and every other large interlocked system, would crash at the stroke of midnight on the year 2000, since prior to that, the dates that had been entered into these machines used only 2 digits for the year (e.g. December 31, 1999 = 12/31/99). The thinking was that when the calendar turned over the computers would think it was 1900 not 2000, because the year would simply be “00”. Whether we avoided that catastrophic shutdown because of a massive effort to fix the problem before it created havoc, or the shutdown didn’t go down that way, I don’t know. I do know that we stayed up late that night, watching at midnight to see what would happen. I remember watching a guy on TV, standing outside a bank, use an ATM at midnight, and rejoicing with him that it still worked! According to Jesus’ words near the end of the gospel of Mark, there is a lot more at stake in the coming of the Lord than making sure an ATM works. He says, “Stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come.” If you know this metaphor, you know that, as servants of the Master, we need simply to be about the work that the Master expects of us: caring for one another and the creation, speaking the truth in love, and living as Christ commanded. To do this is to remain awake.

Prayer

Be near us, Lord Jesus, we ask you to stay, close by us forever, and love us we pray. Bless all your dear children in your tender care, and fit us for heaven, to live with you there. AMEN.