



Monday

Job 42:10-12a, 17

¹⁰And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. ¹²The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. ¹⁷And Job died, old and full of days.

What is often forgotten in telling the story of Job is the end of his story. His story ends in a return to prosperity; indeed “the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.” Not only that, but the family and friends who, throughout the book of Job, had been trying to pin the blame for his troubles on Job himself, now, we learn, show him sympathy and comfort, and bring him gifts. It is as if, after Job has finally silenced all his critics and has declared once and for all that “the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21), that his advisors at long last understand Job’s wisdom. What Job learned, and what we can learn from the book of Job is that we live by virtue of the abundant mercy of God. Neither abundance nor lack comes to us as a direct result of our actions. Yes, there are wise and foolish ways to do things, as well as virtuous and wicked ways to live our lives, and undoubtedly we are called to wisdom and virtue. That being said, neither wisdom nor virtue will guarantee us a pain-free life. We will simply have to declare with Job that whether God gives or God takes away, our trust is in God, the Maker of all things, our Strength, and our Redeemer.

Prayer

Help us to count our days, O Lord. Help us to trust you in good times and in bad. Help us to live in gratitude for all you have given us, and in faith, that, come what may, you are a God of Love and Mercy and Compassion. We are your people. Accept our grateful praises. AMEN.

Tuesday

Isaiah 6:1-5

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

It has always been curious to me why the prophet Isaiah bothered to date his vision of God in the temple. Why did he think it important to write that his vision came "in the year that King Uzziah died"? Was it perhaps because that date was etched in the people's minds, King Uzziah having reigned for 52 years? Or was it because King Uzziah's death from leprosy (see II Chronicles 26) was considered God's judgment against him for his pride? Whatever the reason, Isaiah was clear in his vision: to come into the presence of a holy God is a fearsome thing! Sometimes people ask, "Why do we Lutherans so often begin our worship with the Order of Confession and Forgiveness?" Isaiah here gives us the answer; it is because we who are *not* holy are entering into worship with a God who *is* holy. Knowing this, it is only right that we should begin worship by asking for God to cleanse us from our sins so that we might freely and joyfully worship God.

Prayer

We confess our unholiness, Holy God. We confess that our lives often fall short of all that we know and want as your people. As St. Paul says, "Even what we do not want, that we do." How gracious you are to accept our confession again and again. Keep us near, we pray. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

Wednesday

John 1:9-14

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.^[b]

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

During this Christmas season, of which this is the last day, we celebrate many things. We celebrate the story of Christ's birth in the manger, the song of the angels, the visitation of the shepherds, and the faith of Mary. We celebrate one another as well, as we both give and receive gifts, as we gather for feasts and parties, and as we send cards and greetings to all our loved ones. For me the most profound gift in all of this is stated here in John's gospel: "The Word became flesh and lived among us." This is what makes the Christian story so hopeful. The Creative Word, the Person who was with God and who *was* God in the beginning, and who has no beginning or end, *that One*, has become flesh and blood. And at the same time, that Word continues to be divine in all of its majesty. What a mystery this is, and yet so hopeful, for since God has decided to be one with us, then surely we have no reason to despair. There is hope for this world, and for all our lives, because the Word dwells with us. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

O Great Mystery, how can we thank you for the great sacrifice you have made for our salvation? You have become one of us. You have taken on pain and poverty, cold and heat, life and death, and you know our every temptation. Because you are with us, we do not despair. We live, knowing that you live too, beside, above and within us. Grant us your peace, we pray. In the Name of Christ. AMEN.

Thursday

Matthew 2:1-8

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

This is the Day of Epiphany, the beginning of the liturgical season when we celebrate the appearances of God amongst us. I often think of it as the season when we celebrate the “aha moments” God gives us. Of course, it goes without saying, that aha moments can be either wonderful or terrifying. When King Herod had his aha moment it was terrifying. He suddenly realized that his power was shaky, to say the least. The whole city of Jerusalem also had an aha moment with the wise men’s inquiry, for they all knew that when King Herod wasn’t happy, they were at risk. Aha moments, however, can also be wonderful. Perhaps we suddenly realize that we are not alone in our pain – that someone cares or that God cares. Perhaps we have an emerging sense that we do not need to prove ourselves to anyone anymore – that we are just fine as God made us. Perhaps a person we respect and admire tells us we are gifted and we finally believe it. These are aha moments worth celebrating. They are epiphanies that can change the trajectory of our lives.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, give us wonderful aha moments in this New Year, we pray. Help us to realize how much you love us, how deeply we are blessed in Christ, and how profound is the calling we have as your beloved. Help us to also be a source of inspiration to others. In your blessed name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have always liked the J.B. Phillips' translation of the first 2 verses of this passage: "Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as [those] who do not know the meaning of life but as *those who do.*" He suggests, and I think the original writer means, that our whole life needs to be governed by our relationship with God. We are those who know the meaning of life is, as the reformer John Calvin said, "To serve and enjoy God forever," and so our lives reflect that. No decision, no task, no relationship is outside of this influence. Our lives are caught up in the abundance of being called children of God, and our calling is to be a light and a blessing to others, and so we live with this "due sense of responsibility," joyfully serving others. Making the most of the time we have does not mean making the most money, or achieving the most awards or accolades, or attaining the most degrees; it means living out fully our calling as co-heirs with Christ of all the riches of God's grace. What could be better than that?

Prayer

We wish to be found faithful, Gracious God. We wish to live our lives in joyful service. Grant us your Holy Spirit, that we might be inspired every day to do just that. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.