



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Second Week After Epiphany (January 17 – 21, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 106:43-48

⁴³ Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes, and were brought low through their iniquity. ⁴⁴ Nevertheless he regarded their distress when he heard their cry.

⁴⁵ For their sake he remembered his covenant, and showed compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁴⁶ He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.

⁴⁷ Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

⁴⁸ Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the LORD!

Psalm 106 is an historical psalm; it recounts many of the most significant points in Israel's history, highlighting the cycle of rebellion, repentance, and restoration that characterized Israel's life. If you haven't read the whole psalm, it is worth doing. This psalm reminds me of our regular pattern in worship, where we come together every week and begin with Confession and Forgiveness. It is important to do because, like the Israelites, we are also regularly part of this rebellion, repentance, and restoration cycle: We sin, we feel remorse and confess it, and every time God forgives and restores. We might ask, "Isn't this a futile exercise given that we seem to return again and again to the same pattern?" No, it isn't futile because forgiveness does one very important thing: it cleanses us. That's right, whenever we confess our sin, we are cleansed of it; God forgives and forgets and we are restored. If we do not seek forgiveness, the sin remains, and it eats away at us spiritually. Eventually, this sin that remains in us can give us untold burdens: anger, guilt, depression, even despair. So come to the waters of your baptism every day, confess, and be cleansed.

Prayer

Thank you, Forgiving God, for your unending mercy. Each time we come to you in confession you cleanse us. You never turn us away. Grant us confidence in your never-failing mercy and love, and cleanse us every day that we might walk as free and joyful people of God. We ask this in the name Christ, our Savior. AMEN.

Tuesday

Numbers 27:1-8

Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was son of Hopher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph, a member of the Manassite clans. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. ² They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they said, ³ “Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. ⁴ Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father’s brothers.” ⁵ Moses brought their case before the LORD. ⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁷ The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father’s brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them. ⁸ You shall also say to the Israelites, “If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter.”

There is an old joke that says that the Seven Last Words of the Church are, “We have never done it that way.” Of course, what this is poking fun at is our tendency to resist change. When we are comfortable with a certain way of doing things, we often prefer to just keep doing things that way, even if it no longer makes any sense. In this story from Numbers we see that the people of God can actually change. In this story, the father of the family had died without any sons to pass his legacy onto. According to Hebrew law, daughters were not the recipients of an inheritance. These five daughters were not satisfied with this arrangement, so they came before the leaders of Israel and pled their case. They wanted to be the recipients of their father’s inheritance. What did the leaders do? They apparently assigned Moses the task of asking the Lord for wisdom, and the Lord’s answer was clear: “You shall indeed give them the inheritance of their father.” What do you know? God’s people *can* change! Perhaps God is calling you to a change. As Jesus said, “Let those who have ears, listen.”

Prayer

God of All Creation, we know you have set certain patterns in nature and we are blessed and sustained by them. We also know that patterns that we set up may not always be life-giving for us. Help us to discern between those patterns that are life-giving, and those that are not. We ask this in Jesus’ name. AMEN.

Wednesday

Luke 11:33-36

³³ “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar, but on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. ³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. ³⁵ Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. ³⁶ If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.

This passage seems to be a collection of different sayings of Jesus on the subject of light. The first one is familiar from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus encourages us to “let your light shine so that others may see your good works and glorify your Heavenly Father.” When we let our light shine we are often a blessing to others, bringing a word of Christ to those we encounter. The second saying speaks of the eye as the entrance through which outside influences enter our innermost parts. It is important, Jesus says, to keep your eye healthy so that those things that God wishes to show you may be seen. Keeping our spiritual eyes healthy is an ongoing task as we spend time in prayer, reflection on God’s word, worship, healthy conversation with others, and acts of love. Examples of having unhealthy eyes (i.e. blindness) are when sin and guilt, anger and shame keep us from seeing what God would have us do. Jesus says that it is even possible that what we *think* is light (i.e. understanding and wisdom) is actually darkness (i.e. deceptions and lies). Jesus wants you to be “as full of light (i.e. truth) as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.”

Prayer

Keep us from living in darkness, Gracious God. Take away from us those blinders that steal our joy, and cause us to stumble about in fear and guilt. Grant us clear vision to see the ways you call us to go and avoid the ways that lead to destruction. In all our days, be our guide, that we may glorify you. AMEN.

Thursday

Acts 8:14-24

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit ¹⁶ (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). ¹⁷ Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." ²⁴ Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

In this 8th chapter of Acts we meet a man called Simon the magician. He apparently is quite skilled in his trade, but when he sees the miracles that the apostles perform he is utterly astonished. He becomes a believer and is even baptized. In the course of events, he witnesses the giving of the Spirit through the laying on of hands by the apostles Peter and John, and suddenly reverts back to his magician days. He offers money to the apostles if they will just give him the same power that they have. Peter's rebuke is clear: "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money!" It is part of the history of the Church that down through the ages, countless people have somehow gotten the notion that money is the key to God's storehouse of spiritual gifts. Today, so-called "prosperity gospel preachers" are still at it, telling people that if they will only give a certain sum of money they will gain God's favor or God's power. Without fail the money those preachers receive fails to elicit any blessing from God, but only results in another request for even more money. Beware of this practice, today, called simony, (named after Simon the Magician) when anyone promises you God's blessing in exchange for cold, hard cash.

Prayer

Blessed One, you have given us all things for our enjoyment, and provided us with everything we need from day to day. Keep us from greed and from those ways of thinking that are contrary to your will. Thwart the plans of the wicked, and protect your people from all who would prey upon them. By your power, keep us safe. In the Name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

In some Bibles this passage is called "Marks of the True Christian." There are 30 commands in this passage, every one of them a challenge to fulfill faithfully. I dare say that if this list is a mark of a True Christian, then no one measures up. Only Jesus could meet the qualifications of this job description. And that is exactly the point. This list of virtues can only become characteristics of our life as we are filled more and more with the Spirit of Jesus. Only by inviting Christ to come into our hearts each day and fill us with his Spirit do we have a chance of living like a True Christian. Only by dying to ourselves every day, and letting Christ be our life, can we begin to look like a True Believer. But in Christ, we can! As St. Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).

Prayer

You are our Righteousness, O Jesus. You are our Strength and our Song. You are the Goodness we desire, the Love that we share, the Hope that dwells within us. Help us die every day to our own ego and sin, and come live within us, so that we might bear the marks of a True Christian, bringing glory to you and blessing to others. In your precious name, we pray. AMEN.