



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Third Week After Epiphany (January 24 – 28, 2022)

Monday

I Corinthians 1:3-9

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the opening greeting of the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth. I love the J.B. Phillips translation of verse 5. It reads: "For, as the Christian message has become established among you, [Christ] has enriched your whole lives, from the words on your lips to the understanding in your hearts." Isn't this so? Because of God's gift of faith to us in Christ our lives have been enriched in every way, and not only with knowledge and understanding, but with relationships with others, with opportunities for service, and, as Paul says here, *with every spiritual gift*. Where would we be apart from the grace of God? The Bible describes that state as 'lost', and that seems to sum it up quite clearly. Lost in the wilderness, lost at sea, without a home, utterly alone, away from home, in despair – all of those scenarios might describe us apart from God's grace. But the good news is: Grace has come to us. We are held in God's eternal embrace. It is our great privilege to celebrate this grace and share it with all we encounter.

Prayer

We praise and thank you, Gracious God, for your abundant grace to us. In the mystery of your will you have granted us faith, and we are ever grateful. Help us to live in humble gratitude all our days, seeking to be a blessing to all we meet and a glory to you. In the Name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Isaiah 61:1-4

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

This ongoing pandemic has left many of us identifying with those to whom Isaiah is writing in this passage: oppressed, brokenhearted, captive, prisoners. I have talked to more than one household that has reported, "We don't go anywhere!" That's hard. It's hard to stay away from those you love. It's hard to live in isolation. It's hard feeling like you just can't be safe from the virus anywhere. I wonder if this pandemic time won't be what the Great Depression was for our forebearers; it changed them in profound ways, giving them a mindset that stayed with them all their days. Perhaps this pandemic time will be that for us. The prophet Isaiah is reminding all of us that the time will come when we will experience again "a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning." The time will come when what has been lost will be regained, and what has been broken down will be built up again. God has not abandoned us, and God's favor is from everlasting to everlasting. We live in hope, because our God is faithful.

Prayer

Grant us strength and faith, O God, amidst these trying days. Remind us of your faithfulness. Give us glimpses of your goodness. And help us to be witnesses of your love and grace each day. We pray in the Name of Jesus. AMEN.

Wednesday

Romans 12:3-8

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

The Apostle Paul, in this passage, exhorts us to “think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” This advice has been interpreted in various ways, of course, but the original language suggests that Paul is simply advising us to “be reasonable.” He explicitly warns us against being haughty, but being “reasonable” also means being clear-headed about our own abilities. That’s what the second part of the passage is about. Paul is reminding us that everyone has a gift, everyone has a role, and none is more or less essential than the other. Reinhold Niebuhr, the great 20th century American theologian, famously insisted that our sinful nature is at its most basic level pride. While this is undoubtedly true, feminist theologians have long reminded Niebuhr that a sin equally destructive as pride is the sin of self-denial. That is to say, it is as deadly to say, “I am worth nothing,” as it is to say, “I am worthy of all praise.” Sober judgment. Clear-headed thinking. Reasonableness. This is what God calls us to.

Prayer

Grant us clarity of mind, All-Wise God, as we judge ourselves. Help us to be neither haughty nor self-doubting, but clear that we have gifts, as do all of God’s children. Help us to be graceful with ourselves and with others, seeing all people as you do. In Christ’s Name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Psalm 119:89-96

⁸⁹ The LORD exists forever; your word is firmly fixed in heaven.

⁹⁰ Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.

⁹¹ By your appointment they stand today, for all things are your servants.

⁹² If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my misery.

⁹³ I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.

⁹⁴ I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts.

⁹⁵ The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your decrees.

⁹⁶ I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad.

The 119th Psalm is an acrostic psalm. That is to say, there is a discernible pattern according to the beginning letter of each stanza. The pattern in this psalm is that the first word of each 8-verse stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There being 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, there are 22 stanzas in this psalm. This was done as a memory device, so that students of scripture could memorize this entire psalm, which is a psalm in praise of God's Word. This 12th stanza (vss. 89-96) includes a vow to be devoted to the study of God's Word. This vow, however, is not merely a ceremonial rite, but rather, the writer says, "I will never forget your precepts, *for by them you have given me life.*" This is our testimony as well. As the disciple Peter said, when asked if he would abandon Jesus, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life," so we say, "Jesus, you are our life." The Word of God is food for our soul. We are sustained by its message. We do not abandon God's word, for by it God has given us life. As another verse in this psalm, and a familiar song, says, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

Prayer

We praise you, Glorious God, for your wisdom and grace in providing your Word for us. Through this Word you feed our souls and we are satisfied. Through this Word you give us holy drink and our thirst is quenched. All thanks and praise to you, Gracious God. AMEN.

Friday

II Chronicles 34:1-7

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ² He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. ³ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, he began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and the cast images. ⁴ In his presence they pulled down the altars of the Baals; he demolished the incense altars that stood above them. He broke down the sacred poles and the carved and the cast images; he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵ He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶ In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, ⁷ he broke down the altars, beat the sacred poles and the images into powder, and demolished all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

This account of King Josiah gives us a remarkable picture of this boy king. At age 8 he begins his reign (albeit with counselors, we assume). By age 16 he begins to pursue a life of faith in the manner of King David, and by age 20 he has begun a series of reforms that will result in the total elimination of the pagan practices which had sprung up during the reign of his forbearers. If we look back at the other account of Josiah's reign in the book of Second Kings we see that the impetus for these reforms was likely the discovery of God's law. King Josiah apparently had an epiphany when the Law was read to him, and he acted on that growing awareness, putting away pagan practices, and leading the people once again in following the God of the patriarchs and matriarchs, of Moses and Miriam, and all those who had followed God faithfully. We who are leaders are given an example in King Josiah. We are inspired by his witness to spend time listening to God's Word, and then living and leading in response to that Word. When we do this we find, as Josiah did, that God's people are blessed.

Prayer

Be with the leaders of your Church, O God. Guide pastors and bishops, deacons and musicians, counselors and teachers, to be faithful followers of your Son. Give them open ears to hear your Word, open hearts to receive it, and courageous spirits to live as you inspire. Bless your people with strong leaders and build up your Church, we pray. In the Name of Christ. AMEN.